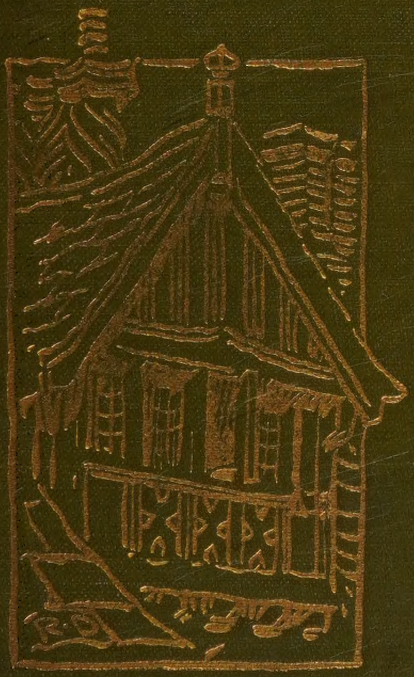
PICTURESQUE CHESHIRE

BY T. ALFRED COWARD

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

BY ROGER OLDHAM



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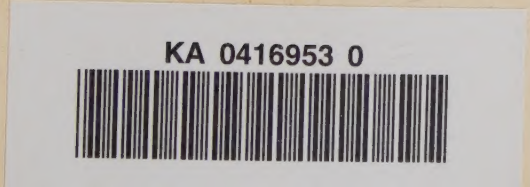

PICTURESQUE CHESHIRE

Moreton Old Hall.

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BY

T. A. COWARD

ILLUSTRATED BY ROGER OLDHAM

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PREFACE

Complaints have been made to me that I love the country too much. That I love it I do not deny; too much is another matter. Now that the dweller in the town can by train or awheel easily find himself far from the toil and turmoil of the necessary city, the love of the country grows apace. Let me offer this book, not as a county history, not as an antiquarian or archæological treatise, not even as a cycling guide, but as a short appreciative description of the county I know the best and love the most.

Though written as a continuous tour I did not cover the whole of the ground at one time; during the spring and summer of this year I visited the various places mentioned. Many of them I had seen before, some of them very frequently; and the more I see of them the more I wish to see. The time-honoured village church with all its old-world associations, the ancient home with its crowded historical interests, the peaceful mere, the old timbered park, and the tree-shaded lane may be visited again and again and never grow stale; the wooded sandstone hills, the rugged grit escarpments, and the wild open moorlands, in any weather, are places of everlasting joy at whatsoever season of the year we see them.

To make this earth our hermitage,
A cheerful and a changeful page,
God's bright and intricate device
Of days and seasons doth suffice.

I have striven to collect my historical information from the most reliable sources, and to those learned and painstaking historians, some of them now no more, who spent years and years in collecting interesting and useful matter connected with the county I am deeply indebted. To owners and occupiers of old halls and ancient buildings, and to many others who have willingly helped me, I tender my warmest thanks.

BOWDON, *October* 1903.

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CHAPTER I

CROSSFORD BRIDGE TO BOWDON

SOME of our English counties seem very old; their ruined castles and ancient fortresses are visible evidences of the life of those whose names and deeds are recorded in history; their cromlechs and menhirs tell of an older people, whose existence is wrapped in shadowy mystery, and whose manners and customs we can only guess at. Other counties have few remains; little to tell us of the people who inhabited them even a few hundred years ago. Nature alone seems to have held its sway as it holds it to-day; the everlasting hills, the deep and placid lakes, the roaring torrents are, apparently, almost as free from the taint of man's interference as they were a thousand, nay, ten thousand years ago. Then there are a few—thank Heaven, a very few! —counties where alike almost all traces of their natural beauties and their ancient history have been eradicated in the rush for wealth; where the murky clouds of smoke hang over the untilled fields, where the whirr of machinery never ceases, and the fires that drive the mills are never quenched; where men are grasping, struggling, fighting for gold, silver, or copper, to add to their mighty piles, or to save themselves from bitter death in the mortal struggle for existence.

Cheshire comes under none of these heads. British for-

tresses, Saxon remains, and even Norman and Plantagenet castles are scarce in the county; but where they once stood are many old mansions, moated farmsteads, and noble houses, which have lived through centuries of troublous and peaceful times, whose banqueting halls have feasted the noblest in the land, whose walls have withstood many a fierce assault. In places the natural beauties have remained unchanged since the world was very young, though elsewhere the tide of commerce has swept away the best. The sister county palatine of Lancaster largely depends on Cheshire for her daily bread, while Cheshire in turn depends on Lancashire's swarming populations for money. Lancashire, especially in the south, is a manufacturing county; Cheshire is mostly agricultural; and so the two go hand in hand, interchanging their various wares, and preserving the mutual aid by trade, which once they freely gave when Lancashire and Cheshire men fought side by side on many a bloody field. Of the great salt trade, so typical of Cheshire, of the extensive suburban districts which form the principal residential portions of manufacturing Lancashire, I shall speak later when my journey leads me to the places concerned.

My route through the county is erratic. The highways are good and enticing, but to keep to highways alone would cause me to miss much of great interest, both historical and picturesque. So I will turn into byways; down country lanes, jolting over round cobbles or riding along the grassy edge to avoid the deep cart-ruts, and sometimes even lift my machine over a stile and wheel it along a field-path. Let not the ardent cyclist expect to find a good route by following in my track, but rather let him keep to my general direction, turning aside where he listeth to visit the spots I visit.

Before starting on my journey, I must pause, rather against my will, to borrow from some of the early historians, and say that Cheshire is notably famous for its old families. Everywhere we go we meet with place-names connected with county

families. Many of these families have become extinct, many have migrated elsewhere, but still in Cheshire, alike amongst the rich and poor, are found an abundance of old county names.

> As many Leighs as fleas, Massies as asses,
> Crewes as crows; and Davenports as dogs' tails,

says the old couplet. "The shire," says Speed, "may well be said to be a seedplot of Gentilitie, and the producer of many most ancient and worthy families: neither hath any brought more men of valour into the Field than Cheeseshire hath done, who, by a generall speech, are to this day, called The Chiefe of men; and for Nature's endowments (besides their noblenesse of mindes), may compare with any other nation in the world: their limmes strait and well-composed; their complexions faire; with a cheerfull countenance: and the Women of a grace, feature, and beautie, inferior unto none." Compare this eulogy with the proverbial

> Cheshire born and Cheshire bred,
> Strong i' th' arm and weak i' th' yed.

Selden affirms that his general remark that "the gentry is from ancient time left preserved in continuance of name, blood, and place" is particularly applicable to the county of Chester. William Smith, who toured at the end of the sixteenth century, gives the Cheshire men a fair character. "They are of stomack, stout, bold, and hardy; of stature, tall and mighty; withall impatient of wrong, and ready to resist the Enemy or Stranger, that shall invade their Countrey; the very name whereof they cannot abide, and namely, of a Scot. Likewise, be the Women very friendly and loving, painful in labour, and in all other kind of Hous-wifry, fruitful in bearing of children."

Right across the county runs a fine highroad, connecting Manchester and Chester. It follows very closely to the line of the Roman North Watling Street, and here and there place-

names cling to this old military road, such as Cross Street, Watling Street, and Holford Street, which remind us of those first great road-builders. Along this road I intend to start my journey.

The last village—now almost a town—on the Lancashire side, is called Stretford, which is indeed nothing more nor less than the Watling Street Ford over the Mersey, the county boundary. But the bridge itself is called Crossford Bridge, and replaced a much earlier structure of wood. "I rode over Mersey water by a great bridge of Tymbre called Crosford Bridge," says Leland, writing in 1538; but in fourteenth-century documents the place is mentioned as Crossferry.

Evidently the Parliamentary forces took the precaution to destroy this bridge in the troublous days of the Rebellion, for Lord Strange met with a check here when marching on Manchester. Between its high embanked sides the not over-clean Mersey flows towards the Ship Canal, for now the river is a feeder of this great waterway. On either side are wide-stretching water-meadows, where, in winter, the floods often lie for weeks, haunted by black-headed gulls which have wandered up the line of the canal till they reached this happy hunting-ground. Here they find drowned caterpillars and worms galore, and much rubbish, edible and inedible, washed down from the upper reaches. To-day, the fields are green, and the young hay-grass—a most precarious crop in these moist "ees," as they are called—is flourishing, and if no clouds gather over the distant Lyme Hills and the great uplands of the Derbyshire Peak beyond, the crop may be safe. But woe betide the poor farmer if heavy rain falls on the hills when the hay is cut for carting, for the mountain streams, the Goyt and Etherow, will pour their roaring peat-stained waters into the narrow channel, and for the safety of the banks the sluices must be lifted. Then this great safety-valve will be filled with water, which will slowly sink into the thirsty ground or drain off into the river again when the spate subsides.

When the plucky train-bands, officered by stout burgesses of Manchester and a few country gentlemen of Lancashire and Cheshire, were waiting behind the graveyard wall of the old church of Manchester, Lord Strange and 300 horse and 4000 foot were gathered in the marshy meadows waiting for the "seven pieces of cannon" to be hauled across the ford, for the bridge was gone and no protecting banks then kept the Mersey from constantly drowning the low-lying land. The soldiers, with petronels and pikes, stood waiting in the rushes, while heavy horses splashed laboriously through the sandy ford or across the squelching field; for late September is not the best time to take big guns across a marsh. Just as one of the cannon was crossing, an axle or a wheel of a gun-carriage broke, and as there was but one fordable spot, a further delay ensued till the lumbering piece was dragged up the sandy, sloping bank. No doubt our R.H.A. drivers would have made short work with this obstacle, but the gunners of King Charles were not so "amazing first in war," and the guns were not built for such rapid transit as they are to-day. A little later, when the Royal army reached the city, they found that the delay had not wearied the defenders, for they met with a warm musketry fire from the narrow streets; after a few days' struggle they retired discomfited, leaving 200 slain and wounded, while the Roundheads only lost four killed and four wounded.

Away on the left, across the Bridgewater Canal and the railway and standing at the very edge of the meadows, is an old white house. Sale Priory is not much to look at nor is it a very ancient building, but it was once the residence of an eccentric old gentleman. A side road runs towards the house, crossing the canal by what is now always called "Dr. White's Bridge," and in amongst the trees, which grow on the bank overlooking the Mersey ees, is a sandstone pillar, crumbling and falling to bits, on which is an inscription: "To the memory of Dr. Thomas White, who, after acquiring prominence

in his profession, retired from its honours and emoluments to enjoy in rural tranquility the pursuit of knowledge." He died in 1776.

But why linger here over an old doctor even if he was, as De Quincey says, "in those days the most eminent surgeon by much in the North of England"? Why? Because always connected with the history of Dr. White and the Priory is the strange story of Miss Beswick, the "English mummy." De Quincey knew him well. "Mr. White," he says, "possessed a museum—formed chiefly by himself, and originally perhaps directed simply to professional objects, such as would have little chance for engaging the attention of females." He (De Quincey) was anxious to show this museum to Lady Carbery. He tells us how everything had slipped his memory "except the *humanities* of the collection; and amongst these, two only I will molest the reader by noticing. One of the two was a *mummy;* the other was a *skeleton.* I, that had previously seen the museum, warned Lady Carbery of both; but much it mortified us, that only the skeleton was shown. Perhaps the mummy was too closely connected with the personal history of Mr. White for exhibition to strangers: it was that of a lady who had been attended medically for some years by Mr. White, and had owed much alleviation of her sufferings to his inventive skill. She had therefore felt herself called upon to memorialise her gratitude by a very large bequest, not less (I have heard) than £25,000; but with this condition annexed to the gift—that she should be embalmed as perfectly as the resources in that art of London and Paris could accomplish, and that once a-year Mr. White, accompanied by two witnesses of credit, should withdraw the veil from her face. The lady was placed in a common English clock-case, having the usual glass face: but a veil of white velvet obscured from all profane eyes the silent features behind. The clock I had myself seen, when a child, and had gazed upon it with inexpressible awe." Of the skeleton I shall have more to say later on.

De Quincey's account is not altogether to be relied on, but the strange story has given rise to so many traditions that it is hard to get at the truth. This, however, appears to be what took place. The old lady, generally known as Madam Beswick, being greatly alarmed because a relation of hers, who had been stricken with fever, had a very narrow squeak of being buried alive, desired to be embalmed. Dr. White successfully performed the operation with "tar," and she was kept out of her grave for over a hundred years—the time, it is stated, she requested to remain above ground.

The present owner of the Priory says that she was kept on the roof in her coffin until Dr. White's death; and I remember that, as schoolboys, we used to see bits of broken wood lying in the Priory garden which we thought were fragments of her coffin or of the old clock-case. Miss Beswick was bequeathed, along with Dr. White's collection, to a Dr. Ollier, who in turn left her to the Manchester Natural History Society, in whose museum for many years she stood in an upright case, exposed to "all profane eyes." The collection of the Society passed into the hands of the Trustees of Owens College, and it was decided that Miss Beswick should be decently interred—not because the hundred years had elapsed, as some assert, but because the "specimen" was not considered desirable in the new collection.

On July 22, 1868, one hundred and eleven years after her decease, Miss Beswick was solemnly committed to the earth. Eager, speculative "body-snatchers" watched the proceedings from behind the wall of Harpurhey Cemetery, for the "English mummy" would have made a splendid penny gaff. I hope she has not been dug up; the grave, I am told, was bushed from coffin to stone to give the resurrectionists as much trouble as possible. *Requiescat in pace!* At last!

It is no rural neighbourhood that we enter when we leave the meadows. Sale is nothing more nor less than a great outlying suburb of Manchester; in another county certainly,

separated by an unbuildable stretch of damp water-meadows, but a suburb for all that. It is not the most desirable place for cycling. A few years ago it was called Sale Moor, but now the last remnant of the moor is built upon, and nothing remains of the heath-covered waste, dotted with bushes of golden furze and broom, where the newly-formed volunteer corps were reviewed before Prince William, Duke of Gloucester, and his son in 1804. Boney was threatening England then, and Manchester and all the district round were not backward in finding young men ready to defend their country. Regulars and volunteers, the latter to the number of 6000, trooped past in gay uniforms and with flying colours. A glorious sight indeed for the villagers of Sale and Ashton, the like of which the place had never seen before nor since. Huge crowds followed the marching soldiers from Manchester, many driving or riding, but far more tramping the five miles of dusty road.

But the soul-stirring day was not to pass off without disaster; stands had been erected for the sight-seers, and some of them were overcrowded. Mrs. Linnæus Banks makes one of her characters join in the crowd that went to view the show. "She had planted herself firmly against one of the supports of an elevated platform, where the crowd of hero-worshippers was densest. Almost as she spoke, there was a faint crackle, then another, and a yielding of the post against which she leaned—a loud crash, a chorus of shrieks, half-drowned by music and musketry, and the whole platform was down, with the living freight it had borne; and she was down with it.

"The fashion, wealth, and beauty of Cheshire and South Lancashire had their representatives amongst that struggling, swooning, writhing, shrieking, groaning mass of humanity, heaped and huddled in indiscriminate confusion, with up-torn seats, posts, and draperies. Strange to say, only one person was killed outright—that is, on the spot—for in its downfall the stand bore with it many of the throng beneath. But of

the injured and the shaken, those who went to hospital and home to linger long and die at last, history has kept no record."

There is very little distinction now between Sale and Brooklands, the next place on the road. Brooklands is named after the family who founded the great concern known as Brooks' Bank. It is told of either old Sam Brooks or his son Sir William Cunliffe Brooks, that a Cheshire farmer,

The High Road at Sale.

made bold by a good day's business and perhaps by a little light refreshment, ventured to address him.

"Are yo," he said, "Mr. Brucks, the great banker?"

"I believe I am, what's left of him," replied the genial gentleman.

"Well; I'll tell you what, Muster Brucks, if I had o' yo'r brass I couldn't sleep i' my bed."

"Well, owd lad;" replied Mr. Brooks, ever ready for a joke, "an if yo had o' my brass, I couldn't sleep i' my bed; so its happen as well as it is."

Away over the fields and lanes to the right, through the village of Ashton, lies Carrington, where, tradition says, took place a sanguinary fight between invaders from Flixton, across the river, and the "Carrington lads." "Carrington feight" was a fierce conflict, long talked about, and though many heads were broken and limbs bruised, no fatal casualties are recorded. The battle does not appear in other than very local chronicles. Were we touring twenty years ago, I would urge the cyclist to risk the thick black mud of the lanes to visit Carrington Moss; but now, alas! Manchester has claimed this beautiful spot, converting it into a "tip" for refuse. Why must our great cities swallow up our most lovely spots?

Carrington Moss, within my memory, was one of the most delightful low-lying moors in the whole county. As schoolboys we spent many happy holidays there, collecting insects and flowers and revelling in the wild, uncultivated waste. The necessity of dodging our sworn enemy, the keeper, only added spice to our visits; what grown man could flounder across the bogs faster than we could skip from tussock to tussock? To-day tin cans and potsherds pave the tramways where lumbering trucks convey the offscouring of the city to be piled upon the ground where the peat has been cut. The Moss, as I remember it well, was one mass of purple ling, with here and there patches of bell-heather, dainty pink andromedas, or sheets of silky white cotton-grass. In damp spots, where grew the white-beaked sedge, the hungry little sun-dews dined on the insect hordes that swarmed amongst the heather. Cranberries and bilberries supplied food in berry time, and the crowberry with its shot-like fruit was abundant.

Grouse were plentiful; it was the best-stocked grouse-moor in Cheshire for its size. Long-billed curlews whistled and bubbled as they rose from their nests; the yellow-nebbed twite, the "heather lintie," built in the clumps of ling that overhung the lips of the deep treacherous ditches—neat little

nests lined with cotton-down. The short-eared owl, now so seldom breeding in our Islands, reared its young in the open, and its long-eared cousin and the brown wood owl hooted from the fir-woods that bordered the Moss. The nightjar churred in the evening, lying prone and quiescent during the day, indistinguishable from the peaty ground; the skylark and the meadow-pipit made the day lively with their songs. Probably the marsh-harrier at one time nested on the Moss, for so late as 1887 one was shot by a keeper, though for many years the bird has only been an occasional visitor. The fierce little blue merlin, however, was a resident; the character of the moorland was just what merlins love.

Vipers were common, and the lively viviparous lizards darted hither and thither in the sun; once we found one sitting on the top of a low stump; once, one hiding in an empty cartridge-case. Here grew the yellow Lancashire asphodel, here flew the Manchester treble-bar—locally named plants and insects. Gorgeous emperor moths, whose bright green, pink-warted caterpillars spun their bottle-shaped cocoons on the heather, were frequently captured; while the wavy-lined heath moths and the brown heath butterflies were so common as to be almost beneath our notice. It was a paradise for the botanist, ornithologist, and entomologist. Now all is changed; market gardens and nurseries have replaced the moorland wilds; tomato tins and broken bottles, scrap iron and mouldy bones lie littered where once the red grouse crowed and the curlew called. Carrington Moss is only a memory and a name. Turn not aside to visit it; it is not worth it now. Its glories have departed.

Beyond the Pelican, an old coaching inn, is Broadheath. Once more we mutter, "Ichabod"; nothing in this very modern manufacturing district conveys any ideas of the beauties of a moor; the broad heath is covered with rows and rows of small houses, where dwell the hands for the works that have recently sprung up like mushrooms by the canal

side. For a brief space, however, I dismount and lean over the parapet of the old bridge which crosses the canal, for, although it is now an "undertaking" of the Manchester Ship Canal Company, it was a great work in its day. Greater is the interest in this dear old waterway than the knowledge that recently the Lord Mayor of London opened yonder wing of the staring red-brick Linotype works. Building a canal 140 years ago was no light task; a more formidable undertaking than the huge Ship Canal of to-day; yet two men schemed and worked it all out—the Duke of Bridgewater and James Brindley, though perhaps the engineer deserved the first place. Cannot we fancy, as the salt-boats pass, that we see the man, plain, rough-spoken, but very practical, lying in bed for two or three days at a time, while his labourers and mules were toiling through the yielding moss. Nice lazy thing that, for the head of a great undertaking! Not exactly, for that was Brindley's way of tackling a difficult problem. "The rugged Brindley," says Carlyle, "has little to say for himself: the rugged Brindley, when difficulties accumulate on him, retires silent, 'generally to his bed'; retires 'sometimes for three days together to his bed, that he may be in perfect privacy there,' and ascertain in his rough head how the difficulties can be overcome." He did not grind at careful drawings, plans, and calculations to work out his schemes: he did not even make voluminous notes. He lay in bed for days at a time, thinking, thinking, thinking, till the idea was clear as day in his wonderful brain, and he rose and attacked the difficulty like a giant refreshed—and always won.

The old market-place at Altrincham opens out a little beyond Broadheath: the market cross is gone and the market is now held elsewhere, but the open space is where it was when the three-year-old De Quincey, after his "morning's drill of ablutions and the Lord's Prayer," looked out of the window upon what he calls "the gayest scene I ever beheld, viz., the little market-place of Altrincham at eight o'clock in the

morning." "Fruits, such as can be had in July, and flowers were scattered about in profusion; even the stalls of the butchers, from their brilliant cleanliness, appeared attractive; and the bonny young women of Altrincham were all trooping about in caps and aprons coquettishly disposed."

De Quincey does not tell us if he stopped at the Unicorn or the Red Lion, for the old inns, or hostelries of the same names, were there long before his day; but not a "Cat and Fiddle," as described by Scott in *Peveril of the Peak*. There is still a little old-world simplicity about Altrincham market, now held a few yards further on. The stalls or booths are erected just as they used to be, and some of the loquacious quacks, holding up weird creatures in bottles before the awe-struck gaze of the rustics, might have learnt their patter from medicos of a hundred years ago; there is no more science in their teaching. Cheap-Jacks shout and clatter their crockery to show its strength; and some of their china dogs, wonderful red-splotched beasts with gilt chains, were cast in similar moulds to their ancestors of the seventeenth century. Cottage art, spite of board schools and higher education, has not advanced much; may it never advance so far that we shall lose sight of the quaint pottery, furniture, and pictures that make the country cottage so enticing.

Altrincham is one of those half-and-half boroughs that can boast a mayor but no corporation. Webb, who contributed a portion of the "Itinerary" for King's *Vale Royall*, describes it as "a town of no meaner government than a mayor of an ancient constitution to her principal officer." The mayor was elected by the Court Leet, and was assisted in his duties by constables, market-lookers, chimney-lookers, dog-muzzlers, ale-tasters, the bellman, and the like. The administration has been wrested from the hands of this antiquated body, but the bellman still goes his rounds, loudly calling, "Oh yes! Oh yes! Oh yes!" Some of the duties of the court read strangely now:—

"Also you shall inquire of sleepers by day and walkers by

night to steale and purloine other mens' goods, and conies out of warrens, fish out of mens' severall ponds or waters, hennes from hennouses, or any other thing whatsoever, for they are ill members in a commonwealth, and deserve punishment, therefore if you know of any such, present them.

"Also you shall inquire of eues droppers and those that are such as by night stand or lye harkening under walls or windows of other mens', to heare what is said in another man's house, to the end to set debate and dissention betweene neighbors, therefore if you know of any such, present them."

We might almost ask if the immortal Dogberry was an Altrincham man?

There are many old jokes at the expense of the mayor. A well-known Cheshire couplet describes—

> The Mayor of Altrincham and the Mayor of Over;
> The one a thatcher, the other a dauber.

"Wattle and daub," the name given to the Cheshire "magpie" style of architecture, explains the occupation of the Mayor of Over. Surely it was not a matter for scorn that hard-working builders should rise to the position of head of the Court Leet.

The Mayor of Over, perhaps a dauber, once strolled into a barber's shop in Altrincham, and when he had been furbished up, remarked, "You may tell your customers that you have had the honour of shaving the Mayor of Over."

"Indeed," replied the barber, "and you may tell your townsmen that you have had the honour of being shaved by the Mayor of Altrincham." Probably this was not the same worshipful gentleman, who, it is said, stayed in bed whilst his breeches were mending. Altrincham has had many mayors, men in various walks of life, but thatchers, daubers, barbers, even the poor man with only one pair of trousers, probably had no more "axes to grind" than the civic functionaries of our great cities.

Justice under the Court Leet was often rough and ready; and Altrincham preserved some of the quaint old punishments —quaint but very cruel—as late as any town. Even in 1822 or thereabouts, the brank was inflicted on a woman who had let her tongue run too freely. When the uncomfortable framework had been adjusted on her head and the iron gag held the unruly member still, she refused to walk, and so was placed in a barrow and wheeled round the town. The man who remembered this triumphal procession has not been dead so long that we need doubt his closing comment: "She ever afterwards kept a civil and respectful tongue in her head." Was she carted round under the direction of Natty Pass, the Altrincham constable, who, riding on a charger which had been at Waterloo, steered through a crowded reform meeting of Hunt's at Stockport, till he approached the flagstaff crowned with the cap of Liberty? Then suddenly putting spurs to his horse he charged, and seizing the staff, broke it off short and bore it away triumphantly in his arms.

Women had a sorry time of it in those days. Into this very market-place, one morning, strode a man leading his wife by a halter round her neck, followed by a friend with a stout cudgel to gently persuade the dame if she objected to be led. Then this Mobberley worthy, for 'tis said he hailed from that neighbouring village, put his wife up for auction. Bidding was slow, and finally the gentleman was pleased to accept one shilling and sixpence for the helpmeet he had sworn to love and cherish. And the constable of the Court Leet does not appear to have raised any objection to the unsavoury transaction.

There was snow lying in the market-place on the quiet Sunday morning of December 1, 1745, when a party of troopers of Bonnie Prince Charlie's army rode into Altrincham. They demanded quarters at the Red Lion, but they did not stay long. There is a strange tradition, very similar to many another story of this ill-fated rising, that the scouts were stopped

by an old woman in a red cloak who sat weeping by the roadside. They were intending to visit Dunham Hall, but the old body begged them not to venture, for she said the park was full of soldiers and it was a pity that so many fine young men should be killed. Either acting on her advice, or desiring to keep in touch with the Highlanders and "Manchester Regiment," which were crossing the river at Northenden, they retired, much to the relief of the peaceful inhabitants.

Just a hundred years before the Highlanders entered Altrincham, Bowden Downs—then a heathy waste with a sandy track, called Burying Lane, leading across it to the old Church—was the scene of another military gathering. In 1644, Prince Rupert gathered his forces "on Bowden Downes and from thence marcht up to Cheadle, where the Parliaments forces ran away. The Prince marches straight to Stopport where they doe the like." How soon after that the Downs were cultivated is not recorded, but Downs potatoes and Altrincham carrots have long been famous. And now even the potato fields have gone.

Once more following Webb we turn "next to the well-known parish church and township of Bowden, conspicuous far off, situate upon a hill." There was a church here when Domesday was written; and when, in 1858, the dilapidated old pile was taken down, bits of this twelfth-century building were found—though no traces of the still older Saxon edifice were discovered. The fine and weathered yew in the churchyard has seen many changes, different buildings and very different vicars, since the Cheshire archers clipped its boughs for bows.

And now, as I stand chatting with the sexton, I am almost shocked to find that I have outlived the yew. Poor old tree! It too, like Carrington Moss and Broadheath, has joined the majority within my day. Still, like the crowded memorials around, it rears its gaunt, leafless arms above its thick bole,

held in close embrace by living, green, parasitical ivy, a monument of the past—dead, but unconquered. Such a tree, not this one, for it is far from the shore, suggested to Lord de Tabley his fine but grim "Churchyard Yew."

> Thy feet grim sloping gravestones pave :
> Thy bole salt crystals smear
> With scurf of briny tear :
> Thy gnarled and torture-twisted form
> Shrinks landward from the scathing storm,
> Year after year.
>
> The robin whistles on a grave,
> His throat with song distended ;
> A butterfly has wended
> To some *hic jacet*, where he clings
> To close and open shuddering wings
> With borders splendid.

And the old sexton thinks they might have saved it if they had left the stone seat which encircled it, and "not 'eaped that rubbish round it."

Standing in the churchyard, "situate upon a hill," I realise that I am only beginning my journey. I have been riding through a district changed and altered by its neighbourhood to a great commercial centre ; in front, stretching away to right and to left is the wide Cheshire plain, so full of woods and clumps of trees that it looks almost like a forest. Close on the right are the old timbers of Dunham, then over the high land of Agden and Bucklow, where the grey road winding up the hill shows like a thread, the many gables and tall chimneys of the Manor House at Rostherne peep out above the trees by the grey tower of Adam Martindale's church. Behind, along the horizon, are the woods of Tatton ; and far away on the left the hills of Bosley and the Staffordshire border. It is not such a view as we can get from Lyme or even Alderley Edge, but it is very beautiful, and shows well the rural character of the country through which we shall travel.

"For years has Dunham Park been the favourite resort of the Manchester workpeople," says Mrs. Gaskell; so, leaving my steed safely housed, I walk down the Greenwalk towards

Dunham Park.

the Park. The Greenwalk, no longer green, was the approach to Dunham Hall. Down this lane, shaded on either side by great trees, the "old lord"—the second Lord Stamford—used

to drive his four-horse chaise, with postillions, and a riding coachman to clear the way.

Dunham Park, like most places near Manchester, is much changed these last few years, and notice-boards give warning about trespassers, dogs, and bicycles, while barbed wire and other atrocities block up all the grassy glades and footpaths through the woods. Yet the park is beautiful; the big open space, where the turf is thick and springy—the coarse grass all nibbled down by the rabbits till it feels like moss beneath one's feet—has still its two clumps of trees, the three and the seven sisters. All round this amphitheatre are fine old trees—fir, oak, beech, lime, and chestnut; and beneath their shade the bracken flourishes, growing breast high. To the right is a sandy scar, all that is left of an old gravel-pit, where in the drift were many fragments of marine shells. A working man, an ardent naturalist but withal orthodox, picked up a *Turritella* shell at this spot and, boring a hole in it, carried it on his watch-chain, exhibiting it with pride as a sure proof of the deluge.

Passing the ancient charcoal-pit, whose great hollow is now filled by tall trees, I cross the lane and enter the Second or Old Park. This, the home park, is surrounded by a high brick wall to keep the deer from straying; the deer-house, a small, barn-like building perched on brick supports, without door or walls so that the deer can pass in and out or feed at the hay-filled racks, stands on the right. On either side are fine, smooth-boled beech trees, forming a noble avenue, in which, alas! time and weather have left many gaps. Contrary to "By Order," I leave the avenue, the crisp last year's beech-mast crackling beneath my feet, and pass on to the pool. As I enter the bracken I disturb the deer, bonnie dappled bucks and does that bound away amongst the fern. The jackdaws in the weather-beaten gnarled oaks fly off with clarion notes, and the waterhens scuttle for shelter, while the rabbits bound across the narrow plank bridges to their burrows on the ever-

green covered island. Finding a convenient fallen tree, I light my pipe and prepare for a quiet evening.

It is an ugly building, this Dunham Hall, right in front of me, not unlike a workhouse; but the stables, with their little clock-tower, are older and prettier. Just where the brook runs from the remnant of the moat there is a tiny but picturesque corn-mill, where once all the corn of the estate was ground. Leaning against the wall, near the now silent wheel, is one of the old millstones; great lumps of rock cemented together. In front of the Hall door the figure of a negro kneels, a monument to a faithful servant of a former owner; on the tall pillars on either side of the approach, are stone heraldic lions, which roar, folk say, when they smell roast beef. Avenues branch off like spokes of a cart-wheel, providing "prospects," while away to the right are the pleasure grounds and the high-walled fruit and kitchen garden; the park was planned on old-world lines.

But the old pile, uninviting as it looks, has many memories connected with it. It has long been empty; its galleries and halls are dark and gloomy, its fittings dingy and decayed. The silver ornaments, once so famous, have all gone; the bed-hangings are rotten and moth-eaten on the four-posters where many a stately lord and lady slept, and the dust is thick on crumbling leather tomes in the library. The great buttery—in the cool cellar—is a glorious room, but it is empty, and no ale-laden waggon now runs round the table in the servants' hall, from which the liveried minions might fill their horns as often as they wished. When the old lord was alive many were the banquets when landed squires from all the country round made merry in the old hall. As I sit I can fancy I see them; I can see too the "young lord" sitting with a few gay friends, each with a selected caterpillar before him, racing them across the table. One has a green cabbage grub, one a woolly bear, another perhaps a gay-tufted "palmer worm." Loud and merry are the shouts as they bet on the respective colours;

but the Earl's grub is slow, and doubling his stakes he pricks it with a pin. Alas for his impatience! The stubborn insect,

Dunham Mill.

feeling the prick, curls itself into a ball, and with a roar of laughter his antagonist sweeps up the stakes.

The shadows of evening are lengthening; the noctules fly out from their holes in the beeches, a nightjar begins to

churr in the Headsman's covert. Through the gloom the Hall grows bigger till it becomes a large quadrangular pile, with many gables and octagonal turrets at the corners; the moat now encircles it, and the farm buildings change to half-timbered barns. To right and left of the terraced lawn are walled-in kitchen gardens, and the pleasure grounds, with trees of yew and box cut in fantastic shapes, are laid out in stiff geometrical patterns. It is not all fancy, for in the spacious entrance hall is a picture, faded and dusty, but clear enough to show what the Hall was like at the end of the seventeenth century.

Still letting my fancy run, I see approaching through the trees two figures—an elderly man in lace-frilled, loose jacket and broad, feathered hat above his wig, and another whose black gown and bands betoken him a parson. They are deep in conversation, discussing perhaps the great religious differences of the day, about which Adam Martindale, then chaplain at Dunham, loved to argue. But no; when they reach the pond Martindale stops and, floating some bits of stick on the water, explains to Sir George Booth, Lord Delamere, his principle of "plain sailing made more plain and short than usual." In his most interesting diary we read, "The next yeare I writ another little mathematicall treatise concerning navigation, called a Token for Ship-Boyes." Not such plain sailing was Adam's life: twenty years before, in 1661, he had been ejected from Rostherne by the "fatall Act of Uniformitie." "When I was first invited to officiate as chaplaine at Dunham," he says, "it was only for three weekes or a month: but this proved to be almost 14 yeares."

Still musing, I see another George Booth, or "Bothe of Doneham Massie," lying in a Tudor bed—perhaps the one still preserved—and signing his last will and testament. "Alsoe I give to ye prior of Birkenhead my best horse to praye for me." Let us hope the horse or the prior, it is not clear which, performed the duty well. Back again a hundred years

to when little Dulcia Venables, decked in fine bridal robes, is given in marriage to Robert le Bothe. Poor little child! She is but nine years old; what can she know of married life? In twelve years, grown old while yet a girl, she attains her majority, and then learns how she was sold that the estates of Styal, Dean Row, and le Bolyn might fall to her share, and Booths possess the house of Dunham.

It is dark now, but I seem to see the embattled towers of a Norman or Plantagenet castle; the drawbridge up, the portcullis down. In the thicket are some horses in charge of a squire, who glances nervously towards the frowning keep when the old mastiff in the courtyard bays. Suddenly figures appear; strong, "brave" men dragging a struggling, half-naked girl, her cries smothered in her own torn night-garments. They reach the horses, and with brutal violence she is flung across a crupper, and away through the woods to the silent moor rides William de Dutton with the terrified, fainting Maud de Stokeport. Rough were the courtships in the days of Edward I.; yet after being indicted at Chester by Hamo de Masci, in whose custody the girl was, William was legally married to the abducted Maud.

I rise from my seat, knock out the ashes from my pipe, dispersing the startled rabbits in all directions. As I stroll back through the silent park, I think of an even earlier owner of Dunham, one Eluard a Saxon. All we know of him was that he "held it and was a freeman" before Hugh Lupus, the fierce Earl of Chester, bestowed the barony on Hamo de Masci. Probably Eluard was not consulted, and his farm or steading was converted into a barn when the Norman baron, without right or justice save the power of might, evicted him. The hissing scream of the barn owl comes from the farm buildings, and the weird, musical hoot of the tawny from the Redmoor covert. All is not changed; for the white owl screeched and the brown owl hooted whether Saxon, Norman, Tudor, or Jacobean building occupied this site. Enough of

Dunham and its many masters; every old house in Cheshire has its history, and these fitful glimmers are easier to pick up than the long, weary pedigrees of the rightful or wrongful owners of the land. To-morrow I must away down the now empty highroad.

CHAPTER II

BOWDON TO RUNCORN

The Chester Road drops very considerably from Dunham to the valley of the Bollin; the dip is known as Newbridge Hollow, though the bridge is getting an old one now. On the right hand of the steep incline there is a curious trench or deep ditch, said to be the actual Roman road. It is now choked with weeds, rank grass and underwood, and grown with elders, birches, and other trees, so that no trace of the old pavement can be seen, even if it still exists. No doubt this is the line of the old road, but it must be borne in mind that all the mediæval roads, descending hills to the river valleys, cut deep into the banks where the ground was soft and sandy, and the present road was diverted slightly when the bridge was built so as not to interfere with the ford during its construction. On the opposite side of the Bollin a similar depression rises from the ford whose sandy banks can still be traced.

A direct line drawn from the Street Ford in Sale Meadows, missing Altrincham, to this ford over the Bollin, crosses one of the walks in Dunham Park at a spot where, after rain, water always lies. A friend of mine, somewhat of an authority on Roman antiquities, assures me that beneath this wet spot would be found the old pavement, for the ground elsewhere is soft and sandy. Watling Street, "well gravelled," has been traced in many places along the route.

Local tradition connects the name of the famous Dick Turpin with Newbridge Hollow, but the story belongs rather to the inn at Hoo Green, which I hope to visit later; so I will ride across the bridge and turn sharply to my right at the top of the brow, wending my way along the Warrington Road. Away, across the Bollin, are the woods of Dunham, the old trees at this end somewhat wilted and decayed through breathing for many years the noxious gases from Widnes; on the left, on the hillside and hidden in trees, is Agden Hall, and after passing through the quiet village of Bollington I mount Agden Brow to the higher ground.

At the top of the Brow are Broom Edge and Wildersmoor; both now but place-names, for the broom has gone as well as the moorland. Below is the wide valley of the Bollin and Mersey; the two streams join just below Lymm. This is more of a plain than a valley, and far away to the north are Rivington Pike and the Yorkshire hills, hazy and indistinct through the banks of smoke that rise from many a Lancashire manufacturing town. Through the trees I can see a rather imposing new-looking sandstone church, with a roof of red tiles and a really fine square tower, and beyond it, towering above the houses of Warburton, is the high-level road-bridge across the Ship Canal at Hollins Ferry.

Warburton old Church is well worth a visit, but it is not the edifice now in view; that is the new church. Turning down the hill at Broom Edge, the lane drops rapidly, dives under the canal and crosses the railway, and a little further on reaches Warburton Mill, an ugly corn-mill, much mended with iron struts, and pointed in patches. At the corner where the road begins to mount for the bridge into Lancashire, walled in by sandstone flags, is the remains of an old cross.

"What is this?" I ask two little girls.

"A cross," says one of them shyly.

"Where is the cross? I don't see it."

But the little maid is not to be caught. "Is it a cross?"

she asks, and seeing me making notes in my pocket-book, she adds, "What's in that book?"

Nothing is left but the stone steps and the base stone, so the little native might well want to know why I am interested in it. She has known it always as "the cross," but that is all she knows or cares about it.

Warburton old Church could easily be missed, were it not that a sign-post directs one at the corner by the cross. Turning through an old-fashioned Cheshire hamlet, there suddenly appears before us the square brick tower, almost overgrown with ivy, of this very ancient building—for Warburton Church is considered one of the three oldest churches in the county. The brick tower and east end is not so venerable, old as it is; nor are the stone walls on the west and south more than two to three hundred years old, but the fourteenth-century timber and plaster still shows on the north wall. Externally it is somewhat of a patchwork building, but inside it is most interesting. Great rough-hewn timbers support the single roof that spans nave and aisles; rugged time-worn timbers they are, worm-eaten and sadly rotten in places, but still the original oak uprights and brackets.

In one of the pews there is a stone coffin with lid complete, which was dug up in the yard, and a field close to the rectory is known as the Abbey Croft. The name of this field and the coffin are perhaps all the traces left of the Premonstratensian Canons who resided here. Nailed to the great oak pillars are some curious hat-pegs; a few inches of buck's horn, the shaft sawn off so as to leave the brow-tine projecting; most primitive, most original, but most serviceable pegs they make. Doubtless they came from the ancestors of the fallow deer which to-day inhabit Dunham Park.

It was the "Saxon Amazon" Æthelfleda—famous daughter of famous King Alfred—who is said to have built the fortress of Warburge-tone, or St. Werburgh's town, to guard the ferry from the invasions of the Danes and Northumbrians. It is

possible, however, that the name originated at a much later date, in the twelfth century, when Adam de Dutton gave part of the manor to the monks or canons of St. Werburgh. The fortress like the abbey has entirely disappeared.

"I'll tear you limb from Warburton," says the Cheshire lad when quarrelling with his schoolmate. The expression, now universal throughout the county, is a variation of an old local saying that it is easier to do anything than "tear Lymm from Warburton," for the parishes were once under one rector. Tearing myself from Warburton, I ride up the hill towards Lymm, a village or town once famous for its fustians. It stands at the foot of a hill; the church, overlooking a picturesque sheet of water, Lymm Dam, is at the top, and a second town has now grown on the Warrington Road, round the hamlet of Lymm Booths.

Lymm market cross is a good example of the village cross, though it has been necessary to replace the sun-dials and central pinnacle. It stands on steps cut in the natural rock, worn out of their original shape by many generations of children. On one of the lower steps are the stocks, very perfect examples of these old-time punishment seats. Not only do the grooved uprights still remain, but the woodwork, with a double pair of holes, though much chipped and broken, is still complete. The hard stone step on which the unfortunate drunkard or "vagabond" sat in doubtful ease is now almost worn away; dire would be the torment of such a one fixed in the wooden grip to-day, for his legs would be raised high in the air.

There is another Cheshire saying concerning Lymm. Anything taken with avidity, anything eaten with gusto is said to be "licked up like Lim hay." The soil is light but fruitful, and the hay-crops used to be considered first rate.

The church, a modern building, is not the one where the old crone, who would fill her pail at the church-spout, received such a shock. This good lady refused to walk to the village pump when she wanted water, but sacrilegiously

used the rain water that trickled from the roof of the church. She was standing one day with her bucket below the spout

Lymm Market Cross.

when a skeleton hand and arm shot forth, struck her, seized the handle, and drew pail and all through the thin pipe.

> Ne'er was the pail nor hand I ween
> By mortal eye again e'er seen.

Probably not.

It is strange how many people find delight in water,

especially water running beneath a bridge; most cyclists—not scorchers, but respectable cyclists—stop when they cross a bridge and lean over the parapet. I always do. Therefore I dismount where the road crosses the Bridgewater Canal and study the passing boats and the distant view.

The Grappenhall road leads away to the left; but though I am bound for that village I will make a slight tour into the busy district of Latchford and Stockton Heath, the outskirts of Warrington. In the near distance a low embankment forms a straight line across the field of vision, and, behold! through the trees and green fields a great red-funnelled steamer slowly wends its way, tugged fore and aft by lively little tugs, for no large boat dare navigate the Ship Canal without a tug behind it to aid in steering.

The old rambling course of the river is destroyed. Here and there short reaches—now stagnant pools—are left, filled with water crowfoot, American weed, and other aquatic vegetation, and stocked with fish by the enthusiastic Lancashire anglers. On Saturday afternoon and Sunday these pools, and in fact all the Cheshire rivers and canals, meres and ponds, where there is free water, are lined with Lancashire fishermen; they will spend the whole week-end patiently watching their floats, quite content if they secure a few small bream or gudgeon.

Thelwall is a quiet little village in spite of its proximity to Warrington. "In the year 920," says the inscription on the Pickering Arms, "King Edward the Elder founded a city here and called it Thelwall"; and Sir Peter Leycester affirms that it was "so called from the stakes and stumps, cut from the trees, wherewith it was environed about as a wall." There was a ford here, or a ferry, which was guarded by a stronghold, but as at Warburton no trace of the fortress remains.

Thelwall Hall is an imposing early Georgian building, with steps leading from the terraced garden to the hall door, with fine ivy-coloured stables and outbuildings on either side, and

with a little island dovecot in the extensive pleasure grounds. Iron gates guard the approach, and a second pair lead to the garden; it is quaint enough to be interesting—stiff but old-fashioned. In the village is the Old Hall, a half-timbered building, with brick above a sandstone base course; now little more than a seventeenth-century cottage, but once an important mansion of the "city." A hen is roosting in the out-door oven, and I recall the old forest laws that entitled the lord of the manor to search the houses and the ovens for hidden deer and game.

Above the broad stretch of canal below Latchford Locks the black-headed gulls are floating, watching with their keen eyes for any edible refuse which may come through the sluices. Beautiful white scavengers! Valuable alike from a utilitarian and artistic point of view. Yet there are plenty of "sportsmen" who spend their leisure time in shooting these birds along the line of the canal, sometimes in the close season, in defiance of county council orders. It is wonderful how many rare birds find their way to the canal—bitterns, skuas, and the rarer gulls and terns. They see the gleaming water and stop to rest or wander inland before a gale, only, alas! to fall to the gun of the wretched pot-hunter or collector.

There was a wooden bridge at Warrington in the fourteenth century, but it was often destroyed or damaged by floods. In 1495 it had become so rotten and dangerous that the Earl of Derby built a strong stone bridge to replace it. It was a brave day for Warrington and Latchford, late in July of that year, when King Henry VII. and his Queen, Elizabeth of York, rode from Vale Royal, where they had been guests at the Abbey, *en route* for Lancashire. Through the narrow streets came knight and lady, squire and dame, guards of honour, courtiers and fools—all the pageantry and splendour of a mediæval court. At the new stone bridge, bright with many-coloured flags, they halted, and the King and Queen

alone rode first across. On the Lancashire shore the Earl and his retainers were waiting to receive them; all the nobility and gentry of the district were there, and all the common folk too, decked in their best. Music and dancing followed, and other great doings. Although money was worth so much more in those days, they certainly entertained royalty more cheaply than we do. One of the items in the bill was seven shillings and eightpence paid "To the women that sange before the kinge and quene in reward."

What an important place Warrington is and was; before these racing West Coast trains tore over the river and high-level railway bridges which cross the canal to and from the great cities of England and Scotland, the rattling mail-coaches sped northward over Warrington Bridge. So, too, when the kingdom was one great battlefield, when Cheshire men were fighting Cheshire men for King or Parliament, Warrington Bridge was a spot to be guarded.

The Duke of Hamilton, with 20,000 men, was marching south in August 1648. Cromwell himself met him at Preston and won the day, driving the Scots before him through Wigan to Warrington. The defeated army crossed, and passing through Cheshire reached Staffordshire; but the bridge saved them for the time. When Cromwell reached the Mersey he found the crossing held by the rearguard of the Royalists, and so strong was their position that he owned himself checked and was forced to yield them some terms. When, a hundred years later, another Scotch force was threatening to use the bridge, the defenders or inhabitants blew up the two central arches, and Prince Charles Edward was forced to cross elsewhere.

Most counties can boast a few centenarians, but which can brag about a more ancient horse than Old Billy of Latchford? He was a "gin horse" on the Mersey and Irwell Navigation, and he died in 1822 at the age of sixty-one. His portrait was painted when he was in good health in 1819; but the only evidence of his extreme age appears to be the memory of the

gentleman, Mr. Harrison, who figures alongside the ancient steed. The print of this picture is well known to print-collectors; they can judge if Mr. Harrison looks the sort of man on whose word they could rely. I will not spoil the story by saying if I believe it or not.

Latchford possessed what were not common in Cheshire, moveable stocks. These curious instruments of punishment

The Ship Canal at Latchford.

may now be seen in the Warrington Museum, a most interesting place where many Cheshire antiquities are preserved. These stocks had a great advantage over the ordinary fixed article, for they could be removed and placed near the site of the culprit's crimes as an additional punishment and a warning to others. They are most uncomfortable-looking arrangements; there is no bar of wood for the feet, but simple iron

fetters, which of course would not fit all sizes of foot. Fortunate the man whose ankles were slender.

On the right the sky looks black and lowering; it is but the smoke hanging above the Lancashire town. A steamer is warping out of Latchford Locks as I ride along the canal side to the accompaniment of the rattle of a donkey-engine and the slow throb of the screw.

At the second swing-bridge I stop and dismount, for it is a doubly interesting spot. Here the Warrington Museum Committee, under the able superintendence of Mr. May, are investigating the Roman town of Veratinum. What a contrast we have! Side by side, within a few yards, are the triumphs of engineering skill of two great eras. We have the Ship Canal, dug out by huge steam navvies, which panted and laboured like great living creatures rather than machines, tearing up all before them; over it, the railways run on iron-girded high-level bridges, with mountainous embankments on either side up which race the Scotch expresses. Then there are the swing-bridges, wonderfully ingenious; great massive-girdered structures poised so beautifully that they turn gently at the touch of a lever. Nowhere in the county, perhaps, is the mechanical genius of man so forcibly depicted. Close by, contrasting with the modern canal, railroad, and highway, is the engineering work of the pioneers of road-building—the Roman way from Condate across the Mersey into Lancashire. Rude and rough are the remains of their work, but we must not judge them harshly; they constructed great roads through uncivilised and uncultivated country—through a hostile country too. Considering the implements they had to work with, and the difficulties to overcome, their achievements compare favourably with our more perfect work. Also, we must bear in mind, when looking at the few imperfect traces now left visible, that time, with its rust and corruption, have destroyed all perishable portions of the work.

A short cinder road, cut in preparation for new suburban houses, has exposed the long-buried road. When the "Old Quay" canal was made, many years ago, the road was first found; the Ship Canal excavations exposed it again, and now this little blind cinder-track has once more revealed its presence. And what is this road? Not sets or even cobbles, but three feet thick of good firm gravel laid on the peat of the surrounding moss, carefully and evenly made, worthy of many a busy modern road. By the side, where the searchers have dug, are the remains of the town; for town it was, and an important one too. When the various Cheshire histories were written the exact locality of this supposed Roman station was unknown; in fact some authorities doubted its existence, and others contended that it was on the northern side of the river. Some time since, however, traces of furnaces or fires were discovered, and a few men had the audacity to contend that Roman, or, more correctly, Romano-British, remains were revealed. They were laughed at by many wiseacres, who said these cinder-heaps were but the relics of the camp-fires of the Parliamentary army that encamped at Stockton Heath, for were not round bullets constantly dug up?

Later investigation—conducted on truly scientific principles—has proved, without a shadow of doubt, that these furnaces were Romano-British work—for it is impossible to distinguish between much of the actual Roman and the Roman-taught British work. The furnaces were an important feature of the station; many more have recently been exposed amongst the rough sandstone pavements and house foundations, some of them containing masses of charcoal, some coal-cinders, some iron-slag. Undoubtedly Veratinum was an iron town, a forerunner of Birmingham and Middlesborough, or, to be more particular, of Dudley and St. Helens. Iron nails were apparently manufactured here, and glass too, made from the fine sand of the district.

Here, by the roadside, are the inclined planes leading to

the thresholds of the houses, substitutes for steps: here are the sandstone blocks forming the floors of workshops and dwellings. The houses and buildings themselves—probably constructed largely of wood and plaster—have disappeared. Here is a great block of stone, roughly hewn and picked, with a hole or socket for a gate-stump: while everywhere littered about are fragments of Roman pottery—cinerary urns, amphoræ, vases of different kinds, with bits of glass and iron nails. But if the visitor is interested in these finds, let him turn across the bridge and ride to the Museum. There he will see all the most interesting articles which have been discovered—coins, glass beads, hematite iron from Ulverston, coal from Wigan and North Wales, querns, jars, tiles, bricks, burnt wheat, instruments of iron and other metals, and a large number of sculptured and worked stones.

It will occur to many, no doubt, to ask why the Romans chose Wilderspool for their smelting mills? I can only suggest what I gathered from conversation with Mr. May, an authority on all these matters. Probably this town, near the head-quarters of the 20th Legion at Chester, and garrisoned, no doubt, by that same legion, for we find XX on some of the tiles, was quieter and better suited for industrial labour than the rugged hill-country of Furness. It is now universally acknowledged that the Romans used coal, and the fragments found are of Wigan (Coccium) and cannel coal, so that they probably brought their iron ore to a spot convenient for the coal supply. Again, Veratinum was a central place; roads branched off from here to Condate (Kinderton), Deva (Chester), Manchester, Buxton, and York; in fact, it was on the high-road to all their more southern stations, while the road through Wigan led to Carlisle and the north. It was a great junction, a Crewe, for Roman roads. Warrington is an important junction still, but the busy station is on the Lancashire side of the border. The Romans had to consider safety; so placed their town on the southern bank of the wide and treacherous

Mersey, a natural defence from the half-conquered savages of the north.

The sand below the remains is being taken away, but not until every inch of the ground has been examined. This part of Veratinum will soon be no more, but everything worth keeping will be kept, every object of interest will be photographed and figured, and careful measurements and plans will be made before anything is destroyed. "Archæology," said Mr. May, when he kindly pointed out the objects of interest, "is now a science." If only former investigations had been carried on in this spirit, how much more we should have known of the life of our ancestors; let us be thankful that the destruction of the old Romano-British manufacturing town means, instead of loss, a great increase in our knowledge of history.

I go no further than the corner at Stockton Heath, then turning sharply leave behind the long streets of villa residences —Greater Warrington—until I see before me the fine square tower of Grappenhall Church.

There is sixteenth-century solidity about the old church at Grappenhall; even where it has been rebuilt and renovated in recent years its former beauty is not lost. It is a fitting resting-place for that cross-legged crusader, Sir William Fitz-William le Boydell, whose effigy reclines in the chancel, and whose body rested beneath the once rush-strewn flags; a fitting shrine too for the oblong carved Norman font, a relic of a very old sacred building. Here on one of the great pillars that support the roof is carved the date 1539, when the church was rebuilt, and on the wall is a brass plate recording the chivalry of Sir Thomas Danyers of Bradley in Appleton. A fighting man was Sir Thomas, father-in-law of Sir Perkin Legh of Lyme; in fact, through his signal services in the French wars, Lyme was given to his daughter Margaret, wife of Sir Perkin.

There was a critical moment in the battle of Cressy, when

the standard of the Black Prince was in great danger. Who knows what panic might have seized on the English army had that banner fallen into hostile hands; history might have been very different. But brave Sir Thomas Danyers was near his Prince, and rescued the flag from the hands of the French, taking captive the Count of Tankerville, though this noble deed is erroneously ascribed to Sir Perkin Legh by a legend in the Legh Chapel at Macclesfield.

The old church deed chest was removed from Grappenhall to the Warrington Museum. It is one of the roughest, and yet the most interesting examples of church furniture of this kind that I have ever seen. It is a length of oak, the lid formed by sawing off a section, and the inside dug out. The old hinges are broken, but the rough hewn work and the three massive locks are well preserved, a memorial of former times

The rambling village of Grappenhall is very attractive; the pink-washed thatched cottages—they tell me the art of the thatcher is lost—the tiny building, half-timbered and thatched like the others, which is dignified by the title of Post-Office, and the village stocks by the churchyard wall carry the imagination back a long way. The "vagrom man" who was fixed in these stocks to repent his sins, or curse the lord of the manor, could lean his aching back against the churchyard wall, spattered no doubt with yellow splashes of rotten eggs. We can well imagine, in such a village, or rather just outside, the creaking gibbet on "Grapnell heath," where swung the body of William Geaton, servant of the Bishop of Chester, for robbing and murdering a Scottish pedlar.

Turning by the post-office we are immediately in the country, riding through Cheshire farm-lands, good agricultural land dotted here and there with spinneys and fox-coverts. The further we go the more rural the country becomes, till we reach a lane with a broad grassy edge on either side, covered with thick clumps of bramble, furze, and dwarf oak bushes, and bordered with banks breast deep in bracken.

At the end of this lane stands a modern church whose low yard wall is built in a graceful curve and angle to leave room for a young thorn tree. Yes, young, for it is but twenty years or thereabouts in age; very young indeed compared with the hoary old whitethorn which it replaced; but it is railed round as if sacred, and pansies bloom round its roots.

Grappenhall.

Appleton Thorn is barely a village; it is even smaller than Appleton Cross, just down the road, or Pepper Street, the little hamlet two or three fields away. I ride as far as the Cross, whose steps still remain, and then return to a picturesque cottage, with porch and gables festooned by clematis and ivy. As the good lady of the house prepares me a meal, I ask her if she remembers the annual rejoicings in the village.

"Oh yes," she replies, "I remember them barning the

Thorn well. But they haven't done it since old Mr. Warburton died."

"What did they do?" I inquire.

"The children danced and sang round the tree, which was decorated with ribbons and things, and in the evening the men had a regular spree at the smithy and the inn."

But outsiders began to come from Warrington and elsewhere, and "roughs" came, and, she adds, "We were glad when they gave it up."

It was on the 29th of June, St. Peter's Day, that they used to barn the Thorn. Barning is a corruption of "bawming" or adorning, from the decorations of the old tree. It must have been a quaint and pretty sight; the sturdy, gnarled old tree gay with coloured paper and ribbons, the school-girls in their white frocks and bright sashes dancing and singing on the tiny village green.

Barn the old Thorn
At Peep of Dawn,
This happy morn
Barn the Thorn.

In Cheshire the whitethorn is considered lucky. If the rural swain wished to compliment his sweetheart, he used to hang a spray of thorn or birch at her door; but if she displeased him, a branch of "owler," or alder, was substituted, which meant that she was a scold.

Dr. Charles Leigh, in his *Natural History of Lancashire, Cheshire, etc.*, mentions a giant's bones which were discovered at Pepper Street, but as there are many Pepper Streets in Cheshire I am not sure if the wonderful remains were dug up in the little hamlet to my left as I ride towards Stretton. Stretton Church is quite a Cheshire landmark; it stands on the Roman road—the same that we saw at Wilderspool—where it crosses the high land between Warrington and Northwich. The Starkeys of Stretton were an important family possessing the village from or before the days of Henry II.

until the beginning of the eighteenth century, paying to the heirs of Geffrey de Warburton "one pair of white-gloves on Easter-day" for all service. Two branches of the family resided here, but only one old hall remains, and the beauty of its timber and plaster is somewhat marred by a very modern roof and porch, though one can hardly expect the inhabitants of the farm to suffer from a leaky roof for æsthetic reasons. The Starkeys bore for a crest a stork, but that is probably herald's slang.

The sign of the roadside inn at Stretton is the "Cat and Lion"; over the door is a picture of a ferocious cat humping and spitting at a very mild-looking lion, and round it is an inscription: "The lion is strong, the cat is viscious, my ales are good and so are my liquors." Passing the inn my way leads through Hatton to Daresbury, where my thoughts straightway turn to snarks and jabberwocks. Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, far better known as "Lewis Carroll," was born in the quiet parsonage here. As a child he lived in "the pleasant land of makebelieve," turning the fields and hedgerows of Daresbury into Wonderland. He lived amongst the meanest animals, and knew them as friends and playmates; "he numbered certain snails and toads among his intimate friends." So he learnt to see the creatures as others could not see them, and so he taught himself those delightful fancies which in later life he wrote about, and so became the author of some of the best children's books which have ever been written. Did the county of his birth suggest to him that delightful character, the Cheshire Cat, who discoursed so learnedly to Alice on the subject of babies and pigs, and who faded gracefully away till there was nothing left but the grin? We may sneer at the writers of children's books, but Alice and her many adventures will live, and many, many generations of children—and old children too—will find enjoyment from the innocent and clever nonsense. Lewis Carroll was a man that Cheshire may be proud of.

Has there been a forest fire here? What is the meaning of the long line of bare trunks and blasted trees, that crowns the ridge of Keckwick Hill? "Here," said Bagshaw, writing in 1850, "is a thriving plantation of fir trees, extending for about a mile in length." And this is the thriving plantation! thriving no longer, for Widnes fumes have done their deadly work. Nowhere is the deleterious nature of the chemical vapours more visible than here, the withered trunks stand stark and naked against the sky. Wherever high land catches the vapour-laden breezes from Widnes the trees have suffered, even at High Legh and Dunham the effect may be seen on the western edge of the woodlands. Strange to say, however, this district is a good one for corn.

At the quarry at the southern extremity of the wooded hill there is a fine view; we seem to have reached the edge of Cheshire. Keckwick Brook cuts off the high land of Halton and Weston from the Cheshire plain that ends abruptly at Keckwick; the Runcorn peninsula is an isolated sandstone hill. Down the near side of the valley the Bridgewater Canal clings to the slope till at Preston Brook it joins the Grand Trunk, then their united waters cross the depression and wind round through the sheltered woods of Norton towards Runcorn; it is a fine prospect but one better viewed from Halton Castle, the old ruin that crests the opposite hill. Red Brow is evidently little used by wheelmen; there is no C.T.C. warning notice; as I descend the steep hill with both brakes jammed hard I am of opinion that one is needed. Under one branch of the canal and one railway line the road dives, then crosses the united canals and the North Wales line. The great round tower where the Liverpool water pipes from Vyrnwy rise before they siphon under the Mersey is another landmark; from many places in Lancashire and Cheshire this tower stands out against the sky. Pheasants swarm in the Norton woodlands; as I push up the hill they run from the fields to the coverts in scores, and many rise from the quiet roadside, rocketing over the hedge.

The wide road that leads into Halton does not look like Cheshire; red rock crops out by the roadside, and the buildings, many of them old, are all of stone. The land of brick and half-timber is left behind.

The village of Halton contains some really beautiful old houses, and the Castle Inn, built on the site of the gate-house, is a picturesque old building. But little remains of the castle itself, time and many sieges have reduced it to a complete ruin, and though some of the Norman stones may stand in their original position it is more than likely that the broken crumbling walls have been repaired many times. A good bowling-green has been made in the outer yard of the castle, and here when I enter through the inn I find Warrington and Widnes working-men enjoying themselves in the castle precincts. "Good wood! Good wood!" exclaims a beery Widnes flatman, who, balancing a glass of toddy in his unsteady hand, is following the course of the game. Perhaps there was a bowling-green here when that famous game of bowls was being played on the Hoe at Plymouth; perhaps the garrison at Halton stood to arms when they saw the warning fire on Beacon Hill yonder across the Weaver Marshes.

Halton Castle, standing right at the top of the hill, commands a glorious view. Due east is the high land of Daresbury and Stretton, the blasted trees of Keckwick crowning the head of the dip; in the valley between and northward towards Moore are the woods of Norton, thick and flourishing where they lie in the sheltered valley, stunted and withered where Widnes has damaged their near edge. Snug in these woodlands stands Norton Priory, a mansion built over the actual crypts of the old monastic house whose history is closely connected with Halton. The straight cut Ship Canal runs parallel to the winding Mersey, whose tidal estuary is fringed with wild saltings. The river narrows at Runcorn Gap, and here on the Cheshire side is the busy town of Runcorn, while just across the bridge are the crowded

chimneys of Widnes. Beyond, over the great Lancashire plain, dotted with manufacturing towns, indicated by the wreaths of smoke which hang above them, are the distant blue hills of the Pennines. Eastward, across the docks of Weston Point and the shining river, can be seen the woods of Hale, where remains the last working duck-decoy in this part of the country. Letting the eye travel still round the compass, the widest part of the Mersey comes into view, a great tidal stretch

Halton Castle.

known as Ince Banks, while right beyond this waste of sand and shallow water are the low hills of Wirral, and beyond them again the distant Welsh mountains. Bordering the river runs the Canal, its great sluice-gates visible four or five miles away, and for miles and miles stretch the flat marshes of Frodsham and Ince, backed by the fine bluffs of Overton and Helsby. Still further away to the south-west is high land, and we recognise Eddisbury Hill by its near neighbour, High Billinge. Little known though this last hill is—it is not even named on the new ordnance map,—the clump of trees which

crowns its summit is one of the most conspicuous landmarks in Cheshire; wherever we go for miles round Delamere we can see this clump of trees.

It would be useless to attempt to give a history of Halton and Norton, or to describe many of the deeds of their redoubtable owners. Are they not written in the Chronicles of the Kings of England? For Halton is a royal baronry attached to the dukedom of Lancaster. One or two facts and incidents, however, I will mention. Nigel, first cousin of Hugh Lupus, Earl of Chester, was first Baron of Halton and chief constable of the city of Chester. Robert Lacy, a descendant of his, who rejoiced in the euphonious title of "Hell," was officiating as constable at Chester fair when news came that Ranulph, his feudal lord, was beleaguered by the Welsh, and in sore straits at Rhuddlan. Lacy, who Leycester tells us gained his surname on account of "his fierce and magnanimous spirit," at once raised an army by calling together all the minstrels, jugglers, stall-holders, and riff-raff of the fair, and led them, women as well as men, to the succour of his lord in the Welsh Marches. What would have been the result if the Welsh had shown fight we cannot tell, but so soon as they saw this motley army they fled to their mountain fastnesses in wild alarm. So originated the power, which Lacy conferred on his henchman, Dutton of Dutton, over all the Cheshire minstrels and other hangers-on at fair-time. From the licenses conferred on these minstrels, and others of worse repute, the Duttons derived a large proportion of their income. This same Lacy held the Castle of Rupe Andeliaci in Normandy for King John, and when, after a year's siege, all his victuals were exhausted, "chusing rather to die like a soldier than to be starved to death," he sallied out with all his garrison and strove to cut his way through the enemy. So struck was the French King with his bravery, that when he was overpowered and made prisoner he granted him liberty on parole.

"Old John of Gaunt, time-honour'd Lancaster," was Baron

of Halton, and when his son, Henry Bolingbroke, became king, the baronry passed to the Crown. The inhabitants of this neighbourhood were a rough lot, and caused a great deal of trouble, though no doubt the barons ruled them with a high hand. Lawless bands lived in the woods round about defying the constable at his very door; inside his door sometimes, for in the reign of Edward II. a party of outlaws besieged and broke into the castle, decamping with arms and armour. There is a curious passage in Whitaker's version of the *Vision of Piers Plowman*, which says that even through

> the pas of Haulton
> Poverte myght passe whith oute peril of robbynge.

Norton was a fat monastery, and it did not escape the eyes of Henry VIII. He gave the abbot notice to quit, and followed up his notice by sending his commissioners to pack up the plate, jewels, and valuables. Naturally the abbot objected; summoning his tenantry to his aid he attacked the commissioners, who were obliged to take refuge in a tower of the Priory, but not before they had managed to despatch a message to the sheriff, Sir Piers Dutton. Dutton no doubt scented the spoils, for he hurried up by night and scattered the monks and their badly-armed retainers far and wide. Sir Piers, in his report to the King, stating how he had captured the abbot and three canons, taken them to Halton and "thear comytted them to ward," says "that the company fledd, and some of them took pooles and wateres, and it was so darke that I could not fynd them"; from which we may conclude that the poor wretches hid up to their necks in the neighbouring marshes. The King sent him "right harty thanks" for his "wisdome, pollesy, and good endevore used for the apprehensyon" of the abbot and others of Norton. He adds: "emediately vppon the s'ght hearof, withoute ony manor further delaye, cause them to be hanged as most arrante traytores in such sondrey places as ye shall thinke requisete

for the terible example of all otheres herafter." Now, in the company taken prisoner was one Randle Brereton, a kinsman of Sir William Brereton, deputy-chamberlain, and maybe Sir William wanted to save his relation's life, for it is certain that it was his doing that Dutton did not hang them all forthwith, but transferred them to Chester Castle to await further instructions. There actual history stops, but tradition tells that the abbot paid the penalty of the crime of objecting to be robbed.

Another Sir William Brereton had dealings with this district —Sir William who commanded Cromwell's army in this part of England. When he made his famous levy of all men capable of bearing arms from sixteen to sixty to fight against the King he fortified Norton, Halton, and Beeston, for the last two places, at any rate, were fallen out of repair. In a rather biassed pamphlet, *Cheshire's Successe*, we read: "One place above others hath been extreamely assaulted, Mr. Brookes of Norton, a neere neighbour to the Earl Rivers, against which they brought their cannon, and with many horse and foote, fell to batter it on a Sabbath day." There were eighty staunch Puritans with Mr. Brooke in Norton Priory, and they held the place gallantly. "A man upon his tower, with a flag in his hand, cryde them ayme while they discharged their canon, saying, 'wide, my lord, on the right hand; now wide two yards on the left; two yards over, my lord,' etc. He made them swell for anger, when they could (not) endamage the house, for they only wounded one man, lost forty-six of their owne, and their canonier; then in divelish revenge they burnt a barne, and corne worth (as is valued) a thousand pound." Halton, too, withstood this siege, thanks to the new fortifications that had been made.

Just below the castle stands the church, and beside it the vicarage and a little squat building, which attracts my attention, for I have forgotten the existence of the Chesshyre Library till I see the inscription over the door —

Hanc BIBLIOTHECAM
Pro communi LITERATORUM usu
Sub cura Curati Capellae de Halton
Proventibus ter feliciter AUGMENTATAE
JOHANNIS CHESSHYRE
miles servicus Dui
Regis ad Legis
D.D.D.
Anno MDCCXXXIII

Within is an oak-panelled room, with several cupboards which contain the four hundred odd volumes which Sir John left for the benefit of the neighbouring gentry and divines. The catalogue, printed on vellum, contains some neat manuscript notes, but from a glance at a few of the volumes I conclude that they have not been much used; they are clean and neat. Sir John Chesshyre, a lawyer of great ability, lived at Hallwood, the big old-fashioned house on the road between Halton and Frodsham Bridge. His body lies in Runcorn Church, and on his tomb are Pope's lines—

> A wit's a feather, and a chief's a rod;
> An honest man's the noblest work of God.

Little it matters to him now that his well-meant munificence has missed the mark. Would it not be better if these interesting books could be brought within the reach of scholars, instead of rotting, as rot they surely will, in this out-of-the-world Cheshire village?

Leaving Halton, I drop down the hill, dismounting for a moment to glance at the tree-shrouded house of Hallwood. A rustic passing I ask him, "Is that Hallwood?" "Aye, that's Hall-th'-wood," he replies, but he knows nothing of Sir John, and probably does not know of the existence of the library, though it is not a mile away.

The flat land at the top of the hill of Halton, round about

the eminence upon which the castle stands, is still somewhat rough, though the fields are fruitful in spite of the blighting influence of the chemical industry. Here in the old days of the barons it was customary to levy a fine of one halfpenny per head on all cattle passing through the district. This was called "thistletake," and was nominally only required if the drover allowed any of his beasts to graze, even so much as to take a thistle; but it is almost certain that the lord of Halton would ask for this fine with such show of force that the passing drover would be glad to pay and pass on.

If Halton is a ruin, what is Rock Savage? Although I am looking for the building I nearly miss it, for there is nothing left of "that sumptuous building erected there by Sir John Savage" in 1565 but two ruined walls and huge fireplaces. Mr. Joseph Stokes, the tenant of the farm under its present owner, the Marquis of Cholmondeley, Earl of Rock Savage, kindly shows me over the ruins, which stand in his stackyard. The Savages, a Derbyshire family, came here in 1488, or thereabouts, and for two hundred years resided in the district. What the age is of the remaining crumbling walls it is hard to say, but there are stones built into the walls here and there which are undoubtedly older work than the middle of the sixteenth century. The old buttressed garden wall, with its rather more recent gateposts, is very interesting, and the recently cut road runs right through the old grounds. Some people say that the old hall was turned into a granary, but Mr. Stokes assures me this is not so; the building in question, a fine barn, was erected out of stones brought from the wall that served to keep back the tide a field or two below, for the marshes were tidal within his memory.

What shall I say of the Savages? Shall I speak of John Savage, knighted at Agincourt, of Sir John who led the left wing of Richmond's army at Bosworth, or of Thomas, Archbishop of York? No; their deeds and virtues are told in the Rivers Chapel at Macclesfield, where so many of the great

members of this famous family lie, and where one of the alabaster effigies was so well taken care of that it was actually black-leaded. One member of the family deserves more than passing notice, for so great were her virtues that two famous men left memorials of her. Lady Jane Savage married early, becoming Marchioness of Winchester, but she passed away when, Milton tells us—

Summers three times eight, save one,
She had told ; alas, too soon,
After so short time of breath,
To house with darkness and with death.
Yet had the number of her days
Been as complete as was her praise,
Nature and fate had had no strife,
In giving limit to her life.

Ben Jonson also wrote her elegy, but it cannot compare with Milton's touching epitaph—

O that you had breath
To give your shade a name. Stay, stay, I feel
A horror in me ; all my blood is steel :
Stiff, stark, my joints 'gainst one another knock.
Whose daughter? Ha ! great Savage of the Rock.
He's good as great. I am almost a stone ;
And ere I can ask more of her she's gone.

We know but little of this mere girl ; it was not customary to recount many of the deeds of the ladies of these noble houses. Still we can gather much from the two poems, and feel that perhaps her short life was more useful than that of many of the great warriors. Let us again quote from the greater of the two poets, the man whose history is connected with this county, and echo his farewell—

Gentle lady, may thy grave
Peace and quiet ever have ;
After this, thy travail sore,
Sweet rest seize thee evermore.

There is a quaint story, the accuracy of which I will not vouch for, about the origin of the name of Rock Savage. A king of England—I do not know which, but James I. was the only one I know of who visited the house, killing a buck in Halton Park in 1617—was sitting with his host when a babe in the cradle commenced to cry. "Rock, Savage, Rock!" exclaimed his Highness, and so it is said the title arose. Mr. Stokes shows me an ancient cradle in his house which is nearly as old as the Stuarts, and I advise him to hang it over his doorway with a painted inscription: "Rock, Savage, Rock!"

Earl Rivers, the Savage in possession of the house when the Parliamentary troubles began, the "neere neighbour" of Mr. Brooke of Norton, was a strong Royalist, and the Puritans began the destruction of the mansion. Earl Rivers retired to Frodsham, and the day after he died, when his body lay in the castle there, the building was set on fire. Tradition says this was no accident, but the evil design was frustrated, for the remains were found in the ruins and decently interred.

The present house at Rock Savage was not built yesterday; it is a fine example of an old Cheshire farm, containing some ancient doorways and panelling which evidently came from the older house. Externally it shows but two stories, but inside there are three, the windows serving for two floors, being so neatly arranged that the trick does not show from the outside. Many of these windows are blocked up, and many others have been reopened since the repeal of the window tax. These blocked-up windows are common in the Cheshire farmsteads, and when certain rooms were exempted from the tax it was customary to fix a label above the window to show the excise man what the rooms were for. Several of these boards existed until quite recently at Rock Savage, inscribed with such titles as "Cheese Room," "Milk Room," and one still remains nailed above the jamb, but the inscription is no longer legible.

This district suffered severely in the great cattle plague;

forty cows died on this farm alone, thirteen being found dead in the shippons one morning. Dairy-farming since the plague has been discontinued here and crops are now grown, for since the stoppage of certain chemical works in the immediate neighbourhood it has been possible to raise good crops of hay, corn, and potatoes, far better ones than can be raised on the Cheshire plain, which is almost entirely devoted to dairy-farming. Every old tree, fruit and forest, was killed by the chemical gases, but the young fruit trees do well and yield excellent crops. "I'll grow apples and potatoes against any man," says Mr. Stokes, and from what I see I quite believe he could.

Weston village is a quaint little hamlet with some old stone buildings and a modern cross erected in the ancient socket, but beyond Weston we leave the old and passing below the famous quarries for Runcorn stone enter the busy seaport of Weston Point. Dugdale says that "Runcorn has lately become a place of resort for salt-water bathing: the fine air and the pleasantness of the neighbourhood constituting useful auxiliaries to the effects of the bath"; and Ormerod wrote, at the beginning of the last century: "Very considerable numbers of invalids from Manchester and Liverpool resort to the place in the summer months for the sake of the sea-bathing and the enjoyment of the air, which is reckoned particularly salubrious." Weston Point which is now connected with Runcorn by a continuous line of docks, was the watering-place for that town.

It is not necessary to search for the salubrious sea-breeze, it is there—almost solid. The sea-front is there too—we cannot say here, for the great wide Ship Canal flows between it and us—while alkali-laden vessels and piles of chemical products on the quays provide the scents and sights we do not wish to see. Docks are not the best places for cycling, but I ride and walk till I reach the tow-path of the Weaver Canal, and then I am soon in Runcorn.

Few places have undergone more change than Runcorn.

Three hundred years ago Webb said: "We see nothing but a fair parish church, a vicarage, and a few scattered tenements," and until the Duke's canal brought traffic so it remained. Then suddenly arose the chemical industry, and Runcorn shot into importance; to-day it is one of the busiest towns in the county. When we pass through Weston Point and as we climb the hilly street, pushing on to get into the country, we see what has made Runcorn. In the town itself are the two series of locks which bring the Bridgewater Canal down to the level of the river; a great engineering work that made the world wonder. That first made Runcorn famous, for the boats met the sea-going vessels in the Duke's Dock and transhipped their cargoes. At Weston Point the Weaver Navigation ends; another great feat of engineering skill, and one which brought the trade to and from Northwich, Middlewich, and Winsford. But the crowning work was that huge waterway, which has carved off as with a knife the sea-front of the Point, for the Manchester Ship Canal at one stroke destroyed Runcorn's last hopes of ever being a health resort and converted it into a seaport of no mean size and importance.

CHAPTER III

RUNCORN TO ROSTHERNE

It is a steep climb from Runcorn to Halton, for I am obliged to return that way; my reward, however, is a new view of the Castle, with a beautiful gabled stone house in the foreground. Then away past Hallwood again to Sutton Weaver or Aston by Sutton. Aston Park, where lived the famous Sir Thomas Aston, the unfortunate Royalist who through trusting to his untrustworthy Welsh troops was so thoroughly beaten at Middlewich, lies on the right. Aston was one of the parks where, until late years, there was a heronry, but though the birds still visit Beckett's Wood, none breed there now.

Some little way beyond Dutton village stands Dutton Hall, not a regular "show place" but one well worthy of a visit. Through the kindness of Mrs. Baxter I was allowed to see its beauties. At first sight the Hall appears to be a fine "magpie" building, but save at one end it is not the original house, for it is cased with brick and the black and white is only paint. But the porch and the interior leave no room for grumbling; Dutton Hall is fine. The present building is only a portion of the original; it is in fact little more than the great hall converted into a dwelling-house by inserting floors and cutting it up into rooms. By noticing the great pilasters and the coved ceiling in the various rooms we realise what a fine place it once was. Undoubtedly the best part is the doorway

and entrance hall, where the great carved doors and ceiling are well-preserved remains of former grandeur; for Dutton Hall was a mansion of no mean importance in the days of Henry VIII.

When at Halton we heard of Sir Piers Dutton, who turned up in the nick of time to suppress the insurrection of the inhabitants of Norton, who had risen to defend their abbot against the king's commissioners. Henry thanked Sir Piers, and told him he would not forget him, and there can be little doubt that Dutton Hall was built out of the spoils of the priory and the rewards of the king. Over the doorway there is an inscription, which gives the date 1542, and inside the porch is the date 1539; probably the porch was added when the building was complete. The inscription, well carved, is as follows:—

syr peyrs dutton knyght lorde of dutton and my lade dame julian his wiff made this hall and buyldyng in the yere of oure lorde god a m ccccc xlii who thanketh god of all.

There is a diversity of opinion about the decorations of the entrance and about the inner door—a beautiful and massive carved oak door—but there is something very ecclesiastical about this door, the IHS, the "five wounds," and other sacred signs and carvings. I am afraid that this doorway and many other good bits of work formerly stood in the looted priory at Norton. The Duttons were a fighting family, able to prove their descent, 'tis said, from Odard, the Norman, who was established here in 1086, and their history tells how they often possessed themselves of their neighbours' goods; can we be surprised if Sir Piers, in all loyalty to king and religion, availed himself of the opportunity of making his new-built house handsome?

The story of the Dutton family is practically the story of Cheshire, for we find Duttons intermarried with nearly all the famous families, and from the Duttons sprang many of the

noble houses. To give the history of the family would be but repetition. I have already mentioned Hugh de Dutton, on whom the Constable of Chester conferred the honour of "magistracy or rule and authority" over all the minstrels and loose characters in the county. This power descended to his heirs, and stately pageants resulted annually, when "the lord of Dutton, or his deputy, rideth upp w'th many gentlemen—havenge a banner displayed before him, and a drumm and trumpett." Then the herald with all pomp read out the charge, in which the lord of Dutton "comaundeth all and every the said music'ons and minstrells and other whosoever acknowledgenge, useinge, and p'fessinge the noble art, worthy science, and high misterie of musique and minstrellzie, etc. etc.," and ending up with "God save the king's ma'ty, his most ho'ble counsell, and the lord of Dutton, and send us peace. Amen." Then the minstrels dined, the lord of Dutton and the gentlemen no doubt feasting at their expense, and they paid their licences or got into serious trouble.

Duttons fought in the French wars, Duttons were slain wholesale at Blore Heath, Duttons were ever to the front if there was fighting to be done. When all was quiet they fought among themselves, raiding their neighbours' lands and even the domains of their near kin. It was a Dutton who abducted Maud of Stockport from Dunham; it was Sir Thomas Dutton who was outlawed in Edward III.'s reign for attacking a house in Wiltshire, murdering and robbing; even Sir Peter Dutton, who fought against Owen Glendwr, was sued for stealing the cattle and maltreating the servants of Sir William Atherton, his Lancashire neighbour. It is only fair to say that there was wrong on both sides, for Atherton had stolen, either before or after this raid, horses and saddles from Dutton. Sixty years later another Peter Dutton was outlawed for a raid, but subsequently forgiven, for we find him lieutenant-governor of the Isle of Man fifteen years afterwards, while Sir Piers Dutton, the builder of the present Hall,

was himself outlawed on the indictment of his kinsmen, the Dones of Utkinton and the Breretons. The Dones were hereditary foresters, and one of the gravest charges brought against Sir Piers was that he had killed deer in the king's forest—a grievous sin indeed! Another count was that he had hanged one Peter Fieldy for coining "naughty crowns," and here again I fail to see the special sin, for some one else, under royal authority, would have assuredly hung Mr. Fieldy if he had caught him. But the Dones, no doubt, coveted the favours which had been bestowed on Dutton, and Henry himself perhaps thought there was something to be gained by disgracing his faithful servant.

Sir Peter did not come into possession of the Hall without much trouble; he was of the direct male line which had been seated for many years at Hatton, and a carved inscription runs right round the hall, visible now in little bits in various bedrooms, telling how the case was tried before "all the jugs of the realme bi the space of vii yeres & above the same sir piers was appioted heir malle & right inhrito^{r} of this howse & all duttons land' & so adiugd bi t' right honorable awarde of t' most fam^{ose} prince king h viii under his brode seale allowed & cofermed."

After reading portions of this lengthy inscription, of which the above is but a fragment, I look out of the window at the end of the fine gallery that runs below the roof, and realise what Leycester says: "The manor-house of Dutton is well seated, and hath great store of meadowing by the river-side. The house standeth upon a pleasant prospect to the opposite hills of the forest." Yes, there in front of me are the pleasant hills of Delamere, High Billinge as usual most prominent of all.

Behind the papering of this gallery is a haunted room, carefully sealed and closed up. It is not known whose wraith is concealed in that dismal chamber; some speak of him as "the old soldier." Which of the long line of warriors, for his

many shortcomings, was doomed to walk the galleries of the old Hall? Would it not be kinder to rip off the paper, open the long closed door, and let the poor old sinner have more exercise? I should, if the Hall were mine.

Before leaving Dutton let me speak of one or two of its more peaceful inhabitants; surely Lady Strangways of York, at one time Mrs. Dutton, was a peaceful old body, for she bequeathed her red velvet bonnet to her daughter-in-law on condition that that young lady would pray for her soul. Then there was brought up at Dutton, the home of his uncle, that fine old Puritan John Bruen, whose name was revered alike by those who agreed with him and those who differed from his austere views. It seems he nearly went astray in this festal Hall in the days of his youth, for we read that "by occasion of musicians and a chest of viols kept in the house, he was drawn by desire and delight into the dancing-school, where he profited so well in that kind of youthful activity that he did not only please himself too much, but his parents also more than was meet with those tricks of vanity."

Thomas, the last Dutton of Dutton, died in 1614, and so ended the direct line, for a few years before a little boy of fourteen, John Dutton, the heir to the estate, fell from his horse near Tarvin and was killed. The pathos of the death of this lad lies in the fact that he was returning from his wedding, bringing with him his bride Elizabeth, who died two years later at the advanced age of sixteen, as her tombstone says, at once wife, widow, and maid.

Somewhat reluctantly I leave Dutton; few places are more interesting in the county, and yet Dutton is only one of many seats of families whose story is woven into the history of England. A little further down the Northwich road I turn to my left and make towards Budworth.

Higher and Lower Whitley lie on my left, nearly a mile from the road. It was at the former village that Adam Martindale was schoolmaster, and where "a giganticke fellow that by the

favour of a colonell had beene a captaine of horse (though never fit to be a corporall)" tried to force the schoolmaster to teach his children free, "by club law, threatening most hideously how terribly he would bang" him. And so the captain and the future parson fell out, and long and fiercely struggled together in a quiet Whitley lane; the one man big and powerful, the other, as he himself says, "very nimble and strong for my pitch." Gripped in a close embrace they fell into a sandy ditch, and Adam might have won the day, had not some of the captain's farm-hands come up and held him while the bully thrashed him with his "staffe." A military relative of Martindale's offered to take up the quarrel, but Adam would not sanction him to do so, for, he says in his diary —"Yet (blessed by God) nothing was broke but the peace and my pate, which without any costs was speedily well againe."

Half a mile beyond Comberbach there is a gate into Marbury Park. Marbury Hall, a good modern building, surrounded by fine elms and beeches, is surpassed by few Cheshire seats in the matter of situation. At the foot of the terraced garden is Budworth Mere, a beautiful sheet of water, but little inferior to Rostherne in size and scenery, pleasantly wooded on two sides, and with great reed-beds fringing its margin. Leaning my machine against a tree, I seat myself on the stump of a felled monarch of the park to enjoy the view; the moorhens, which have been feeding with the Hall chickens, scuttling down the bank to the water. Directly below, between the evergreen-covered islet and the shore, is a thick lily-bed, where the broad-footed moorhens walk daintily across the pads, and the heavier coots swim laboriously amongst the trailing stems. In the shadow of the laurels of the Hall garden a grey-backed heron stands, motionless but alert, and on a stump beside it a brilliant kingfisher is perched. So intent are both these birds on their fishing that they do not notice my presence. Further out, flashing in the sunshine, are the white breasts of the great crested grebes, and

where the wood comes down to the water's edge wild mallards are swimming with the call ducks.

A little further along the path which crosses the park is a clear brook in whose deeper holes the young bream congregate, and which forms a sandy spit or delta where it enters the mere. On the sand a dozen black-headed gulls are standing, and a few lapwings dabble in the shallow water. A group of Canada geese—birds semi-wild throughout the county—move sedately from the grass as I approach; then taking wing they fly over the water, clonking loudly, and splashing up great waves when they alight. The reed warbler titters, and the reed bunting stutters in the waving reeds, the mallards quack sonorously, and the deep croak of the grebe mingles with the sharp metallic cluck of the coot; and yet we are on the edge of the great salt district, the busiest part of central Cheshire. To the left like Bowdon, "set on a hill," is the weathered old church and clustering village of Great Budworth; and to the right, above the woods, the smoke of the many chimneys of Marston Forge and Northwich.

> Thence to th' Cock at Budworth, where I
> Drank strong ale as brown as berry:
> Till at last with deep healths felled,
> To my bed I was compelled:
> I for state was bravely sorted,
> By two porters well supported.

The "Cock at Budworth" was Drunken Barnaby's first stop after leaving Warrington. In the parlour is an oil painting of that disgraceful reprobate being assisted to his bed, but the successor of "mine host Tom Gandi" has not that trouble with me, though here I elect to stop the night. It is a good sample of the coaching inn, with its plain brick front, its sundial, and its cobbled yard, where geese are strolling sagely. With these birds is a semi-domestic Canada goose, a bird captured in the neighbourhood, which has thrown in its lot with its big white relations.

Leaving the old coaching inn next morning, I drop down the hill to the corner, where a little shelter contains a spring of clear cold water, the Budworth water supply, and then mount the still steeper hill up the village street. Budworth is a great resort for cyclists, and no wonder, for it is a dear old Cheshire village, and the view from the churchyard is charming. In the wide valley below are two

"The Cock" at Budworth.

meres, Budworth, which we have just visited, and Pickmere, a smaller but yet fair-sized sheet of water. The teeming, thickly populated alkali district is not lovely, but from here we certainly see it to the best advantage; as a background to the fields of corn and the woods of Marbury, it offers certain picturesque advantages. A barn owl resides in the tower, I see from the cast up pellets littered among the graves; the owl is proverbially wise, and this one proved so indeed, if it chose its roost for scenic advantages.

In the church in Sir Peter Leycester's day his monument is here by the way—there was the case of a "fair organ," embellished with the arms of Arley, Tabley, and Marbury, but without any pipes, the sacrilegious Roundhead soldiers having ripped out the inside, "which some Scotchmen among them called Whistles in a Box." The organ, Sir Peter thought, was bought from Norton Priory at the time of the dissolution. I wonder if it was paid for. In the Dutton Chapel—formerly called Lady Mary's Chapel—once stood a carved wooden image of the Virgin, with gilded shoes and real hair; but, by command of Queen Elizabeth, it was taken down, hewed into little bits, and burnt in the vicar's oven.

Pickmere village, a mere cluster of cottages, is out of our way, but a glance at the mere may not be out of place. It lies in a hollow, and passers-by on the road can easily miss it altogether; a stream leaves its western end and runs into Budworth. A large part of the bank of Pickmere is fringed by a dense reed-bed, where, as at Budworth, the reed warblers and great crested grebes find shelter for their nests, and between the two meres an osier-bed gives suitable cover for other birds. In the reed-bed I have found, resting on a platform of dead stems, the round nest of the water vole, containing blind, feebly squeaking young "water rats," as they are more commonly called here. Here, too, in spring I have watched the crested grebes on the wing, an unusual sight; strange birds they looked with their long thin necks extended, and the wide-spread tippets round their heads. The grebe is a bird of the water, seldom taking wing unless driven by the frost to fly to the open waters of the neighbouring estuaries.

Budworth and Pickmere, perhaps because they are rather nearer to the Mersey Estuary than most of the other waters, attract many migratory birds in autumn and winter. Diving-ducks—pochards, tufteds, and sometimes goldeneyes—may frequently be seen in parties of various sizes, sometimes a dozen, sometimes a hundred birds or more in a flock; and

though the mallards do not congregate here in the immense numbers which often visit Tatton and Rostherne there are frequently flocks which must include some hundreds of individuals. Once, and once only, I was able to distinguish a single scaup amongst the diving-ducks, and on several occasions I have seen shovelers with the mallards. About twenty years ago the appearance of gulls upon these waters was looked upon as a sign of bad weather, but now black-headed gulls haunt this district at all seasons of the year, while herring- and lesser black-backed gulls, both mature and immature, often come in, and in winter a few common gulls wander from the shore.[1]

Perhaps in days of yore the bittern nested in the reed-beds, as no doubt it did in the neighbouring Whitley Reed; at any rate the bittern occasionally pays a flying visit to the neighbourhood and if unmolested will remain for some time. These visits, of course, have only been in winter or early spring, but from the lengthy stay of at least one bird it would appear that the surroundings are congenial. I flushed the only bittern which I have ever seen in a wild state in Cheshire from a reed-bed on Budworth Mere.

Cormorants, mostly immature birds, sometimes come to fish in these waters, and jack snipes and green sandpipers pay winter visits to the margins and the brooks. Goosanders have occurred here, and I have watched that grand bird, the great northern diver, fishing at Budworth, while a heavy storm once drove an unfortunate little auk to the same water. Passing

[1] Black-headed gulls are quite a feature at Budworth; often there are flocks of both old and young birds feeding in the fields near the meres, consorting with rooks and starlings, and there are always a few birds swimming on the water or flying round in a desultory manner. The sand-spit is their resting place; here they stand in the shallow water or lie upon the sand, while one or two of their number perch upon the stumps which project above the water or on the railings of the fields. These railings, where they run out into the mere, are used by the kingfishers; from them they can dart into the water after their prey, and on them they can batter the life out of a struggling little fish. In one place the rails glisten with the scales of innumerable fishes which have been slain upon them.

migratory wading birds are attracted by the sand-spit at Budworth; here I have seen ringed plovers and dunlins wading in the shallow water, and one day a little stint, a very tame bird, was paddling about at the same spot. Sometimes a black tern will spend a few days in the neighbourhood, loitering up and down the mere and now and again dipping diagonally towards the surface to capture an insect; indeed, there is no telling what interesting bird may turn up on any of the Cheshire meres, and Budworth ranks high as a likely place for rare stragglers.

Aston Park lies between Budworth and Arley. It is a stiff brick house, decorated with a carved canopy over the door, and with ornate rain-spouts, dated 1715. It was a residence of some of the Warburton family, but there is little known about its history. In spite of this, from its fine position, standing at the end of a long avenue of limes, it looks a most interesting old house, such a country house as one associates with the novels of Scott and Harrison Ainsworth. It must have been more interesting still when it had its old front—for the front is much later than the rambling back—and its avenue of stately firs, which were replaced by the limes.

Arley, the residence of Colonel Warburton, is, as Webb says, "a place worthy to be regarded," though the house which stands there now was only built in 1755, and was enlarged and altered in the middle of the last century. Arley Pool, the dammed up Birch Brook, is a beautiful sheet of water, where, the gardener tells me, "There are acres of water-lilies"; a statement I can verify from what I see of the Pool from the little rustic bridge that crosses it.

> This gate is free to all good men and true,
> Right welcome thou if worthy to pass through,

is the invitation carved on the doorway, and like hearty welcomes greet one at the corners of the roads in the neighbourhood, for Squire Rowland Eyles Egerton Warburton was a

poet and a genial man. His hunting songs are well known throughout the county.

The Arley troop of yeomanry have had for colonel an Egerton or a Warburton for many long years.

> The Cheshire Yeoman Cavalry are men of high renown,
> Give credit to their country and honour to their crown;
> When mounted on their warlike steeds to Liverpool we'll go,
> Along with Colonel Egerton, that valiant hero.

More serious work than marching to the review at Liverpool has been undertaken by many of the Arley yeomen lately, and though the bantering old song made jest of their fighting qualities, the long struggle in South Africa tried and proved their mettle.

Arley has been the seat of the Warburtons since the days of Henry VII.; Piers Warburton built the first Hall, when he removed from the little village whose name he bore, on the banks of the Mersey.

The gardens of Arley are worth a visit, though leave is necessary. Stiff, clipped hedges are not always objects of beauty, but here they are thoroughly in keeping. There is a maze, a graveyard for animals with epitaphs in rhyme, and a beautiful herbaceous garden. In the rockery are the best osmundas I have ever seen, and the holly hedge that borders the pathway to the grand old stables—for they are older than the Hall—is as tall and fine as any one could wish for. But the little green by the pool, which can be seen at any time, with its Judas tree, old timbered schoolhouse, and neat cottages, is a charming spot. Many a happy villager has danced round the May-pole here, many a proud little girl has announced,

> For I'm to be Queen o' the May, mother,
> I'm to be Queen o' the May.

There was once a housekeeper at Arley named Elizabeth Whitaker, who in 1763 married the head gardener, and changed

her name to Raffald. She was of a literary turn of mind, and four years after her marriage published *The Experienced English Housekeeper*, a work which was "wrote purely from Practice, for the Use and Ease of Ladies, Housekeepers, Cooks,

Arley Green.

&c." It was not this book, however, that caused Harland to call her "the great female lawgiver and benefactress of Manchester," but a work which has now developed into a ponderous annual volume, for in 1772 she issued the first *Manchester Directory*. She says in her introduction to this interesting little volume:—"I have taken upon me the arduous Task of

compiling a *Complete Guide*, for the easy finding out every Inhabitant of the least Consequence; as also most of the Country Tradesmen, and the Places where their Warehouses are situated." So the great City of Manchester, and especially the firm of Slater, are somewhat indebted to Arley.

Pleasant lanes, with rough wild hedges, lead back in the direction of Whitley Reed, once "one of the deepest and wildest mosses in Cheshire." In 1850 there were 320 acres of mossland, but shortly after this date reclamation commenced, and now, though the land lies low and holds water in places after heavy rain, it is all good fertile country. Round about the names of the farms and fields tell of the former condition of the land. We have Moss Hall, Moss Wood Hall, Stretton Moss, Sinks Moss, Park Moss, Moss Covert, Birch Gorse, and Reed Gate, all of which stood on or round the wild morass.

Swineyard Hall is a pretty moated grange standing in a clump of trees by the side of Swineyard Lane. The moat no longer encircles the "magpie" house, and it is not deep, though it is said that a Legh, returning home late one dark night, rode into the water and was drowned. Swineyard was one of the seats of the Legh family of East Hall, High Legh, so early as the fourteenth century. Moats are plentiful in this district. There is a good one at Bradley Hall, where lived the redoubtable Sir Thomas Danyers, and another at Reddish Hall, half a mile away, but in neither places are the old halls standing. These moats are eloquent of the unsettled days of yore. Some defence was necessary for farmhouses, for even when civil war was not desolating the land a family feud might bring a neighbouring landowner, with an armed retinue, to lift the cattle, while the outlawed gentry, smarting under their deserved or undeserved disgrace, needed no feud to induce them to levy toll upon their law-abiding neighbours.

The road from Warrington to Knutsford runs past the end of Swineyard Lane. Nearly a hundred years ago a gardener's boy, a braw Scotch laddie, walked along this road in deep

thought, turning over and over in his mind the substance of a placard he had read in Warrington, and recalling the teaching of a loving mother away across the border. Robert Moffat, the veteran missionary to South Africa, was a gardener at High Legh, and so attractive and clever was the lad that the family built him a cottage near the Hall. But there was a higher career for Moffat than gardening, and so it happened that one day, when shopping in Warrington, his eye lighted on an old placard of a missionary meeting, causing him to consider if he, though but a humble gardener, could not be of use in the great mission field. When, after that long and noble life spent in the service of the Master, Dr. Moffat retired to well-earned rest, he visited High Legh once more.

Can we not see the fine old Doctor, in his eightieth year, with his venerable white hair and beard, looking at his cottage once more. "It was here," he said, as the tears rolled down his sun-scorched cheeks, "the Lord revealed Himself to my soul five and fifty years ago."

Two families of the same name owned the East and West Halls at High Legh, though the West Hall family spelt the name Leigh. No relationship is claimed, but it does not seem unlikely that the original owners were descended, in both cases, from the Venables, Barons of Kinderton. The old West Hall stands a little way from the road on the opposite side from the Park, a fine demesne that extends almost to Hoo Green.

There is a good bowling green at the "Kilton" at Hoo Green, well known to picnic parties from Manchester and elsewhere. It was on this self-same green that a game was in progress, when that smart gentleman of the road, Dick Turpin, pulled up his sweating black charger, and smiting the ostler across the shoulders, asked him emphatically what time it was. Then the redoubtable Richard joined in the game, swaggering about the green so as to be noticed by all the sporting gentry. When, later, it transpired that a dastardly assault and robbery

had taken place within a few minutes of the time stated by the ostler, it was considered impossible that this gay but suspicious Turpin could have ridden from Newbridge Hollow to the inn in so short a time, and his alibi was accepted. This story is familiar; Dick Turpin's ride from London to York, and other tales of the same notorious character, are so similar that we must accept this legend *cum grano salis*. Dick Turpin may have been here; but the true history of the man shows him to have been no dashing, chivalrous highwayman, but a cruel, mean swindler and burglar, a man who liked to rob lonely houses where there were defenceless women, especially when he had a gang of similar lawless desperadoes at his back.

High Legh and Hoo Green stand high; there is a considerable drop from the "Kilton" to the "Swan" at Bucklow Hill, the cluster of houses that gives a name to the hundred. From the summit of the hill, a little north of the village, it is hard to realise that Bowdon, which seems to be perched so high, is really at a lower elevation than Hoo Green. From the top of Bucklow Hill, however, there is a better view than from High Legh, for the ground falls away to the eastward, and beyond the tree-covered bluff of Alderley we can see the long range of hills on the borders of Derbyshire and Staffordshire; away to the north the bare moorlands of Lyme, with the higher Peak Hills beyond, and southward a series of moor after moor which ends at Mow Cop. Clear and distinct are the rounded summit of Shuttlings Low, the whaleback of Bosley Minn, and the steep edge of Cloud End. With the aid of a glass we can catch the light on White Nancy, the summer-house that stands at the end of Kerridge, and just to the left of the highest part of Axe Edge can distinguish the moorland inn—the "Cat and Fiddle."

A little to the east of the Manchester and Chester road lies Rostherne, a charming little village without a public house—and none the worse for that—and with pretty cottages, whose porches are almost lost in ivy and creepers, lining the road,

while others stand on a high bank above the steep village street. Snuggling in a great hollow is perhaps the most delightful of all the Cheshire meres; bordered on one side by a thick hanging wood, where the wood-pigeons nest and where hosts of pheasants find shelter, and on the other by the village with its square-towered church peeping above the trees. Ormerod says, "the general effect of the lake is nevertheless gloomy, from the dark shade projecting over its waters by the unusual elevation of the banks which surround it." Gloomy! Rostherne Mere gloomy! It is surely never that.

It is worth while to run down the hill to the corner below the turning to the village and view the lake from there. The full expanse is hidden by the hanging wood on the left, but on the further side, half hidden by the trees, are the old tower of the church and the tall chimneys of the manor house, while little woods and spinneys dot the opposite slopes, fringed where they meet the water with waving reed-beds. The little brook enters at the village end and sparkles over a clean pebble-bed; but at the far side where it leaves the mere, it is broad and deep, creeping along the edge of a great osier-bed in whose straight-cut gutters the brown hares crouch, looking more like clods of earth than living animals. In this stream, amid the dead reed-stems and the waving water-weed, the big pike lie, motionless but alert, and the trout which ascend from the Birkin do not always reach the mere. From the churchyard, levelled to the top of a moss-grown buttressed wall which crowns the slope, the whole sheet of water lies in view. The trees of the long wood, and the graceful brown plumes of the waving reed-bed are reflected in the shining water, which here and there is dotted with coots and moorhens, black specks in the distance, while the satin breasts of the grebes flash in the sunlight. In the fringe of reeds and bulrushes at the foot of the bank below the reed warblers sing as they cling to the stems near where there pendant nests are hung, and a few quacking mallards and a graceful white swan add to the life

of the scene. In summer, at any rate, Rostherne is not gloomy.

And when in winter the fierce wind lashes the water into foam-crowned waves, when the bare trees sough and the withered brown reeds swish in the gale, when the diving ducks—tufteds and pochards—and the great flocks of mallards, with perchance a few shovelers, bunch together head to wind bobbing as they meet the waves, Rostherne may be wild, even awe-inspiring, but it is not gloomy. When, too, the

> Mere-waves, solid as a clod,
> Roar with skaters thunder shod.

When all the lake is one huge sheet of ice, and glistening festoons cling to tree and weed alike, or the fields are white with snow; when the grebes and ducks have sought the open estuaries, and the disconsolate coots moon about the yet open brook or fly high above the skaters in great perplexity; when the trickling streams on the bank below the church are ice-slides or frozen waterfalls, and the broken reeds are brown and wilted—even then Rostherne Mere is not gloomy.

Cheshire abounds in meres, many of them by no means insignificant—Rostherne is nearly three-quarters of a mile long by half a mile in breadth, and Tatton, though much narrower, is over a mile in length—which greatly enhance the beauty of the country. Much has been conjectured as to the origin of these meres and pools, and it seems probable that many of them—though a large number are artificial ornamental waters—were caused by subsidences above the salt deposits. Where brine-pumping is carried on the ground is sinking, in places to an alarming degree, above the melted rock-salt, and it is quite possible that natural agencies of a similar nature may have been at work in days gone by. Fresh water percolating the sandstone may have dissolved beds of salt and the ground have sunk to fill the vacuum. Whatever has caused the mere, or the hollow in which it

lies, the fact remains that it is very deep, though not so deep as popular tradition would have us believe. There are several stories about the depth of the mere; one states that

Rostherne.

there is a passage to the Red Sea, but why to the Red Sea I do not know. Another affirms the existence of a subterranean waterway to the Mersey, which is used every year by a mermaid.

When the belfry of the church was being repaired and new bells hung, one of the bells was very obstinate, three times rolling down the slope to the edge of the water. Twice the perspiring workmen rolled it up the slope, but the third time one of them lost his temper and exclaimed, "Thou senseless lump, I would the Devil had thee!" No sooner had he spoken than the bell leapt backwards, crushing the unfortunate man, and shooting over him into the water. The Devil does not seem to have claimed the bell—he does not like church bells—for every Easter morn a mermaid, having swum along the underground passage from her native ocean, rises to the surface and rings the bell. But let me leave tradition and turn to reality and history.

Rostherne Church is somewhat patchy, though parts of the building are very old. It has several chapels and is full of memorials of the families of Tatton, High Legh, both East and West Halls, Agden, Mere, and Over Tabley, many of which tell of brave deeds and worthy lives; but there is one monument that is both interesting and beautiful. On a white marble altar tomb reclines a young girl, and over her stoops an angel; it is a lovely piece of workmanship, worthy of the sculptor, Westmacott.

Sacred to the Memory of
Charlotte Lucy Beatrix Egerton.
Born September 13, 1824,
Died November 10, 1845.

Softly she slept—in that last hour
God's angel hover'd nigh;
He rais'd with love that fragile flower,
To wake in bliss on high.

Weep not, she is not dead, but sleepeth.

The name of Adam Martindale is closely connected with Rostherne; he was Presbyterian vicar here till he was ejected

at the Restoration. He was a fine specimen of the Puritan, steadfast, hard-working, resolute, and honest, though withal superstitious, somewhat quarrelsome and very narrow. Many were his troubles, for the people were by no means amenable to his strict discipline, but their opposition only made him strive the harder to win them. One or two extracts from his diary will perhaps throw side-lights on his character better than any description.

"I now enjoyed great libertie of worke, and had worke enough to doe. Preaching twice every Lord's-day to a great congregation (whereof some were very judicious, others as captious), besides expounding, catechising, and all other publick worke," etc. "There were a sort of giddie-headed unsettled people among us, whereof some we hoped were honest, but very weake and unsettled, others apparently defective in common justice towards men, and little better than barettors in setting people at variance." With these he had many "paper-scuffles."

"My backe-friends tooke care I should not live without disturbance (though sometimes they plaid but at small game). The rabble of prophane youths, and some doting fooles that took their part, were encouraged to affront me, by setting up a May-pole in my way to the church, upon a little banke called Bow-hillock, where in time past, the Sabbath had been wofully profaned (as tradition goes) by musick and dancing; and where, in my time, there was a randezvouz of rake-hells, till I tooke an effectuall way to rout them." After appearing not to notice the insult, he preached at them, telling them that "a May-pole was a relique of the shamefull worship of the strumpet Flora in Rome." Then he asked Mr. Brooke of Congleton to preach at Rostherne and "he did most smartly reprove their sin and follie, calling them by most opprobrious names, as the scumme, rabble, rife-rafe (or such like) of the parish; insomuch, that my words were smooth like oyle in comparison of his, so full of salt and vinegar."

Mobberley.

Mrs. Martindale, however, took more effectual steps to stop the young men. She went by night to the May-pole, and with the help of three young women, "whipt it downe with a framing-saw, cutting it breast-high, so as the bottome would serve well for a diall-post." The Baron of Kinderton was much annoyed and sought for informers, and the magistrates issued warrants against the young women, but no one would give satisfactory evidence, neither would any inform against Martindale, with the exception of one man. "Just as he was to watch me as the cat doth a mouse, to qualifie himself for a noble informer, his man comes riding downe the towne upon one of his best horses, which, falling downe under him, the master is fetched speedily out of the church, and he came soone enough to be a witnesse to his horse's last will and testament and quiet decease; but returned too late to witnesse anything against me."

Adam Martindale thought a great deal of his children and never tires of praising their virtues, but he had poor luck with them, and at least four died while he was at Rostherne. One son, John, "was so ripe a child for wit, memory, and forwardnesse in learning and religion for his yeares," that he was almost frightened for him. He taught him Greek verses, which the little lad pronounced "gracefully" but did not understand, but "he was too forward to live" and died of smallpox. Then there was another John, called "after his toward brother that died the yeare before," but he too died, and Adam and his wife feared that they "had offended God by striving with his Providence to have a John." Adam tells how this little fellow, when but two years old, would beat off "a wanton tearing calfe, that would runne at children to beare them over."

Last I must mention his eldest daughter Elizabeth, "so wittie" a child that when she was but three years old her testimony was taken against a man who had committed an outrage and he was hanged. From the house where she died

to this quiet churchyard, a distance of a mile, Elizabeth's body was carried by the young women of Rostherne, for they had learnt to love her so dearly that they would not suffer any man to touch the coffin. Can we not from this conjure up the picture of this sweet, prim Puritan maid, and see reflected in her some of those qualities which make us reverence the name of that one-sided but fine old man Adam Martindale.

There is an interesting piscatorial fact about Rostherne; early in the last century Mr. Egerton acclimatised some smelts, salt-water fish, in the mere. They throve and multiplied, and large shoals of these silvery little fish are sometimes netted. I have myself seen numbers of them embedded in the ice when the lake has been frozen.

The most direct way back to Bucklow Hill is but little used, for there is a steep dip in it, down to Cicely Mill; it is, however, a pretty little lane with a high hedge-bank on one side and a wooded clough on the other. It brings us out again close to the "Swan," where we turn towards Knutsford, passing *en route* another fine sheet of water at Mere. If we can gather anything from the mysteries of heraldry there was once a mermaid here as well as at Rostherne, for the Brooke crest is a mermaid proper—indeed quite proper, for she has golden hair and green tail, and the necessary comb and mirror. Mere New Hall, a large modern building, stands on the far side of the water.

CHAPTER IV

KNUTSFORD, THE PEOVERS, AND TABLEY

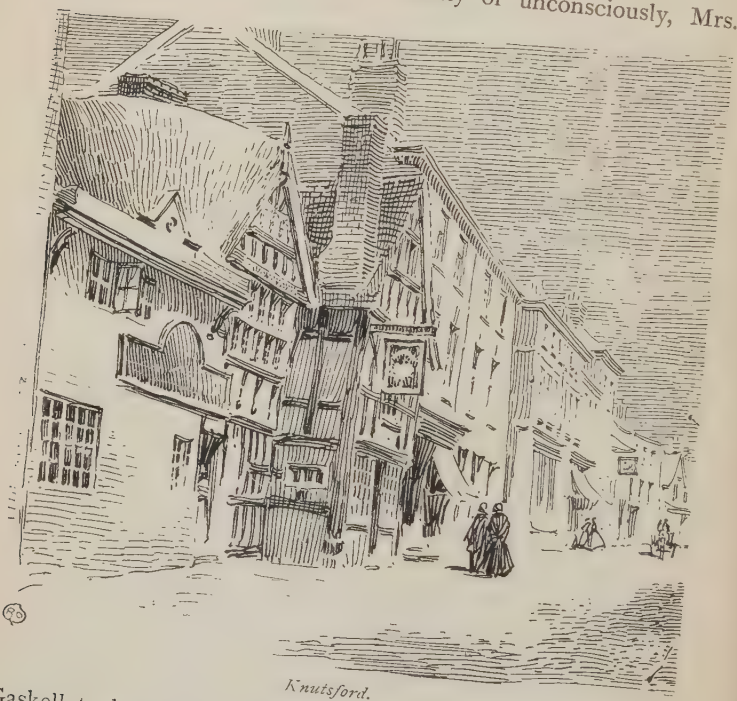
At the end of the park and woods of Mere I turn to the left down a pretty lane that skirts the wall of Tatton Park. Tatton Hall, surrounded by the largest park in the county, is the seat of Lord Egerton; the present mansion was built by Squire Wilbraham Egerton, a member of the family of Egertons of Ridley, to which branch belonged Sir Thomas Egerton, Lord Chancellor of England. Quaint old Fuller tells how "he apply'd his muse to learning in the University" in the middle of the sixteenth century, with such splendid results that both Queen Elizabeth and King James I. showered well-deserved honours upon his head. He gave his legal advice in the framing of many important treaties; he sat in judgment on Lord Cobham and Earl Grey of Wilton, and on the Earl and Countess of Somerset when they were tried for poisoning Sir Thomas Overbury; he is well described as "the most excellent pattern of a most excellent chancellor."

Tatton Park stretches for miles, beautiful undulating park-land with fine old timber and a mere more than a mile in length. At the lower end of this long pool, which in winter is a great place for mallards, teal, and other ducks, stands the old hall, a pretty old house now converted into two dwellings. Tatton Park is always pleasant, but it is perhaps at its best in autumn, when the brown, red, and yellow leaves

have not all fallen from the trees, and when the ground below the old thorns is littered with seeds cracked by the hawfinches. At this season the deer are busy, for in Tatton there are herds of both red and fallow deer, and also a large flock of St. Kilda sheep. There is music in the park in October when the great stags are contending for the hinds. Then we may watch the battles-royal which we can seldom see on the wild mountains of the Scotch deer-forests, for the Tatton stags are used to visitors. Stags at this season must be approached with caution, for the brow tine of an angry stag is a lethal weapon, yet we may safely go near enough to see the conflict. It is a grand sight to watch an old hart, with "brow, bay, tray, and three on top," and great shaggy mane, standing in front of his harem, bellowing defiance to the other stags. Sometimes a younger stag will venture to cut off a hind, and then the irate lord rushes after him, and if he hesitates there is trouble. The bell-like roar is silenced as the hard-breathing antagonists crash their antlers together and push and struggle over the turf; now one gives way, now the other; now a point catches the neck and blood flows, till finally one of the stags is fairly pushed off the field. It is seldom that serious wounds are given, for the contending animals do not strike with the brow point as they would if attacking a man or a dog; they batter each other with their antlers—sometimes breaking them—and strive to shove one another out of action. The hinds, gathered in a close group, watch the fray with pricked ears and big round eyes, for upon the result depends who shall be their future lord and master. The victor treats his wives with scant courtesy, driving them back into a crowd whenever they seem inclined to roam. And so the fight goes on, and the park resounds with the challenging roars, till the younger stags tire of the struggle to obtain wives, and feed quietly apart or join their forces to the hinds which still are tending calves.

Passing the main gate of the Park we reach Knutsford,

where on the wall of the post-office is a medallion portrait of Mrs. Gaskell, the work of the Italian artist D'Orsi, and the gift of a Knutsford inhabitant, Mr. R. H. Watt. At the base of the bust is a book with the inscription "Cranford," for there is no doubt that, consciously or unconsciously, Mrs.



Knutsford.

Gaskell took Knutsford for her model of the scene of that delightful story. Knutsford may well be proud of Mrs. Gaskell, who, though not born here, spent her childhood and youth in her aunt's house on the Heath. The Rev. George A. Payne, in his *Mrs. Gaskell and Knutsford*, affirms on good authority that Mrs. Gaskell did not draw either her characters or her

scenes consciously from actual models, yet there can be no doubt that she wove into her stories impressions of people and places that lingered in her memory.

Close to the post-office is the "George," where they show the Assembly Room, and the old staircase; the oak panels and furniture carry us back at once to Cranford days. Can we not see the dear old ladies in their shabby-genteel clothes and new caps—Miss Matty somewhat depressed that she is not adorned in a sea-green turban—sitting in this Assembly Room watching with awe the clever tricks of Signor Brunoni? The Honourable Mrs. Jamieson, fat and inert, is wiping her spectacles "as if she thought it was something defective in them which made the legerdemain"; Miss Matty leans over to Mrs. Forrester and asks her "If she thought it was quite right to have come to see such things? She could not help fearing they were lending encouragement to something that was not quite—— A little shake of the head filled up the blank." In the parlour of the same inn, too, was that happier gathering which closes the story, when the white-haired, sunburnt Mr. Peter—no longer "Poor Peter"—told Mrs. Jamieson how he had shot a cherubim.

"'But, Mr. Peter, shooting a cherubim—don't you think—I am afraid' that was sacrilege!'

"Mr. Peter composed his countenance in a moment, and appeared shocked at the idea, which, as he said truly enough, was now presented to him for the first time; but then Mrs. Jamieson must remember that he had been living for a long time among savages, all of whom were heathens; some of them, he was afraid, were downright Dissenters."

Up the narrow passage by the "George" (Knutsford abounds in narrow passages from the lower to the upper street) tradition says Miss Matty used to trot in her pattens to her house at the top, from whose upper windows, the present occupant declares, were showered the comfits and lozenges upon the heads of the eager expectant Cranford children.

In the higher part of Knutsford is the Heath, a wide, breezy, open space, now somewhat contracted from its former dimensions, but still an excellent "lung" for the town, whose wise authorities have enclosed it so that it cannot fall into the builder's hands. On this heath there was at one time a racecourse, and now it is the scene of Knutsford's annual festival on May Day. There is no Mrs. Martindale now to cut down the May-pole, and so every year some proud little school-girl is crowned Queen of the May amidst surroundings in keeping with the old-time festival, and in the presence of a great throng, gathered not only from the country round, but from the great towns of Chester, Manchester, Warrington, and Liverpool. On this festive day the high-road between Manchester and Knutsford is but little less busy than the Epsom Road on Derby Day; if it happens to be fine, one long stream of busses, drags, traps, and other wheeled vehicles, and a perfect army of motors and bicycles hurry through clouds of dust Knutsfordwards.

Elizabeth Cleghorn Stevenson lived with her aunt, Mrs. Lumb, in one of the houses overlooking the Heath. "In her hours of childish sorrow and trouble," says Mrs. Ritchie, "she used to run away from her aunt's house across the Heath and hide herself in one of its many green hollows, finding comfort in the silence, and in the company of birds and insects and natural things." Close to this house is another, a plain brick building overgrown with ivy, where lived the hero of "The Squire's Tale," a story of Mrs. Gaskell's which appeared in a Christmas number of *Household Words*. When De Quincey took Lady Carbery to see Dr. White's Museum, they did not see the English mummy, but only the skeleton of a highwayman, who he calls X, not knowing his real name, and whose strange history he tells.

"In candour (for candour is due even to a skeleton) it ought to be mentioned that the charge (that of murder), if it amounted to so much, arose with a lady from some part of

Cheshire—the district of Knutsford, I believe;—but, wherever it was, in the same district, during the latter part of his career, had resided our X. At first he was not suspected even as a robber—as yet not so much as suspected of being suspicious: in a simple rustic neighbourhood, amongst good-natured peasants, for a long time he was regarded with simple curiosity, rather than suspicion; and even the curiosity pointed to his horse more than to himself. . . . At length, however, a violent suspicion broke loose against him; for it was ascertained that, on certain nights, when perhaps he had *extra* motives for concealing the fact of having been abroad, he drew woollen stockings over his horse's feet, with the purpose of deadening the sound in riding up a brick-paved entry, common to his own stable and that of a respectable neighbour. Thus far there was reasonable foundation laid for suspicion: but suspicion of what? Because a man attends to the darning of his horse's stockings, why must he be meditating murder? The fact is—and known from the very first to a select party of amateurs—that X, our superb-looking skeleton, *did*, about three o'clock on a rainy Wednesday morning, in the dead of winter, ride silently out of Knutsford; and about forty-eight hours afterwards on a rainy Friday, silently and softly did that same superb blood-horse, carrying that same blood-man, viz. our friend the superb skeleton, pace up the quiet brick entry, in a neat pair of socks, on his return."

De Quincey goes on to tell how during that interval of time a lady and her maid were robbed and slain in Bristol; but it was long after—in fact, after Higgins had been hanged for another robbery, that the murder was laid to his account. Mrs. Ruscombe—not Rusborough, as De Quincey calls her—possessed much treasure in Spanish coins from the mint of Mexico; but a short time after this mysterious journey, "Knutsford, and the whole neighbourhood as far as Warrington, were deluged with gold and silver coins, moidores, and dollars" from this mint.

This story is perhaps not quite accurate, but the substance is correct; other tales and incidents were remembered when the true character of the man was found out. Higgins kept his hunters and visited with the neighbouring gentry, and there is little doubt that it was he who stole Mr. Egerton's snuff-box when that gentleman was entertaining him amongst other company at Oulton Park. After a County Assembly—possibly at the "George"—he determined to possess himself of Lady Warburton's jewels, and followed her coach on its way back to Arley. She escaped without even knowing her danger, for she recognised him as he rode up to stop the coach, and called out: "Good-night, Mr. Higgins! Why did you leave the ball so early?" On another occasion he entered a bedroom in Chester where a young lady had just retired after an evening's entertainment. He was unlocking her jewel case, when she turned in bed and said in a sleepy voice: "Oh, Mary! you know how tired I am, can't you put the things straight in the morning?" Higgins afterwards asserted that if that girl had seen him, he would have murdered her on the spot; in his confession, which was published, though the accuracy cannot be vouched for, he affirmed that the Bristol murder was the only one that could be laid to his charge. De Quincey's tale may be erroneous, "The Squire's Tale" but fiction, but in yon ivy-covered house lived Edward Higgins, country gentleman, highwayman, burglar, and murderer, respected by all who knew him in Knutsford—till he was found out.

It is stated that when King Canute, in 1017, led his victorious army against the King of Scotland and the Prince of Cumberland, he forded the Lily at Canute's Ford or Knutsford. This may or may not be the origin of the name; the Lily is but a ditch that one can jump across, and we find no Knutsfords where he crossed deep and wide rivers, yet it must be remembered that the marshes—still remaining as the moor and the bog—would be deeper and more difficult to

cross nine hundred years ago. Even to-day, spite of the fact that it is but a stone-throw from the houses, the marsh is a nasty place to cross; here grows still the fragrant orchis and the rare marsh helleborine—first recorded from this spot by Aikin in 1796—and here, in the dirty stagnant pools, the dabchicks dive within a few yards of passers-by on the footpath.

Near the station the Lily passes beneath the road where, at the corner, stands Brook House, the residence, it is said, of the Honourable Mrs. Jamieson herself. But "Drumble" has invaded "Cranford" since the railway came, and it is no longer "in possession of the Amazons"; looking at the crowds of modern houses it is hard to realise Miss Barker's lime-scorched cow in grey flannel waistcoat and drawers, the unfortunate cat crammed in the doctor's borrowed boot to take its medicine in order that the swallowed lace might be recovered, and the trotting sedan chairmen in Darkness Lane. But stay! Turn from Cranford to "Ruth," note the description of Mr. Benson's chapel, and then walk up the steps close to Brook House; Knutsford and Cranford fade away and surely we are in "Eccleston."

"The chapel was up a narrow street, or rather *cul-de-sac*, close by. It stŏod on the outskirts of the town, almost in the fields. It was built about the time of Matthew and Philip Henry, when the Dissenters were afraid of attracting attention or observation, and hid their places of worship in obscure and out-of-the-way parts of the towns in which they were built. Accordingly, it often happened, as in the present case, that the buildings immediately surrounding, as well as the chapels themselves, looked as if they carried you back to a period a hundred and fifty years ago. The chapel had a picturesque and old-world look, for luckily the congregation had been too poor to rebuild it, or new-face it in George the Third's time. The staircases which led to the galleries were outside, at each end of the building, and the irregular roof and worn stone steps looked grey and stained by time and weather. The

grassy hillocks, each with a little upright headstone, were shaded by a grand old wych-elm. A lilac-bush or two, a white rose-tree, a few laburnums, all old and gnarled enough, were planted round the chapel yard; and the casement windows of the chapel were made of heavy-leaded, diamond-shaped panes, almost covered with ivy, producing a green gloom, not without its solemnity, within." "The interior of the building was plain and simple as plain and simple could be. When it was fitted up, oak-timber was much cheaper than it is now, so the woodwork was all of that description,

The Unitarian Chapel.

but roughly hewed, for the early builders had not much wealth to spare. The walls were whitewashed, and were recipients of the shadows of the beauty without; on their 'white plains' the tracery of the ivy might be seen, now still, now stirred by the sudden flight of some little bird."

Need I give any further description of the Unitarian chapel at Knutsford, save that it is a sycamore that throws its shade over the silent dead, and not an elm. This very building was erected in 1689, and here Matthew Henry preached. There are many more things I might tell of this old-fashioned,

historical town, but I must be moving on. Two ministers of this simple but beautiful old chapel have told the story of Knutsford well and truthfully: the Rev. Henry Green's *History of Knutsford*, and the present minister's *Mrs. Gaskell and Knutsford* are not merely read locally. As I stand by the little white cross and read—

ELIZABETH CLEGHORN GASKELL
Born September 29, 1810;
Died November 12, 1865.

I feel that there could be no better place for Mrs. Gaskell to rest than in the silent little graveyard of the dear old chapel.

As I am leaving Knutsford my eye is attracted to some strange decorations on the footpath before one of the houses, and I see at once that there has been or is about to be a wedding from that house. Sanding the street in front of the bride's house is an ancient custom in Knutsford. Dugdale says, writing in 1819, "On the marriage of any of its inhabitants, the friends and acquaintance of the parties practise the singular custom of strewing their doorways with brown sand; and on this they figure various fanciful and emblematical devices, with diamond squares, scallops, etc., in white sand; and over the whole are occasionally strewed the flowers of the season." The custom has not died out in Knutsford; it is one of those innocent and pretty local survivals which we should all be sorry to lose.

Bexton Hall, the seat of an old Knutsford family at one time, lies a little way to the right of the Toft road. It is a strange example of old-fashioned architecture, with its roof crowned with a lantern, but it is not on the direct road and has no particular historical interest. Beyond Toft Hall, the home of the Leycesters, where the rabbits are swarming in the park close to the oak railings, we come to a clump of Spanish chestnuts at the turning for Ollerton. These are called the Seven Sisters, and the same or a similar legend is related of

them that is told of the seven trees in Dunham Park. The lord of a neighbouring hall wished for an heir, and whenever a daughter was born "they only made him swear," so he planted a tree as dower for each, keeping the estate for his longed-for son. Seven maids were born and seven trees planted—

> And each fair maiden she grew apace,
> Full beauteous to the sight;
> And the trees and maidens both were called
> The Seven Sisters bright.

At last a son was born, but some old wizard, perhaps having a spite against the squire, cursed him at his birth. The lad went abroad to complete his education by foreign travel, returning to claim his birthright. The night he arrived a terrible storm was raging, and just as he passed the trees a flash of lightning fulfilled the prophecy, apparently knocking him into little bits, for "each fatal tree was stained with gore."

> The seven sister-trees may still be seen,
> Though the mortal ones are fled;
> And none of that fated house were left,
> When the Squire himself was dead.

Moral—Do not offend gentlemen who deal in occult sciences.

At Toft, according to the Rev. Henry Green, the old custom of heaving on Easter Monday and Tuesday was kept up after it had been discontinued in most other parts of the county. Even the master and mistress of the house took their share in the fun; on the first day the men heaved or lifted the women, and on the next the women had their revenge on the men. In different parts of the country this custom, a survival it is said of a vulgar representation of the Resurrection, was managed in various ways; sometimes the parties lifted were simply raised on the crossed wrists of two or three of the opposite sex, sometimes they were heaved lying flat on a bed or mattress, and sometimes a garland decorated chair was used. This last was the course of proceedings at

Toft; the person to be heaved seated himself or herself on the throne and was lifted three times, then he was obliged to "put his hand down" and pay the lifters. Amongst the rural folk kisses were also exchanged, but there is no record if this claim was demanded from the lords and ladies of Toft. It seems to have been an opportunity for the servants of the house to get "tips" from their master.

The "Mainwaring Arms," which stands by the gate of Higher Peover Park where the road divides, is locally known as "The Whipping Stocks," and the road to the left is marked on the old maps as Stocks Lane. The old instruments of punishment have disappeared, though probably here as elsewhere in Cheshire they were frequently used. Our ancestors believed in summary justice.

Higher Peover is the seat of the Mainwarings, a very old Cheshire family; in the park, close to the Hall, is the church where most of the family were buried. The church itself has been restored and rebuilt at different times, but the two chapels have been allowed to remain much as they were built. The south chapel is the oldest, dating back to 1456, when Dame Margery erected it in memory of her husband Ranulphus, surnamed Handèkyn the Good. In this chapel lie the figures in alabaster of the husband and wife, wearing the S.S. collar, and with the motto, "IH̄Σ Nazarenus" on Randle's helmet. There is a fine old chair in this chapel which belonged to Dorothy Mainwaring in 1545, and which is said to be even older than the lady who possessed it.

The north chapel is more modern, built, however, in 1648. Dame Ellen, widow of Sir Philip Mainwaring, both of whose effigies rest on a marble tomb, built this mortuary chapel. Round the walls hangs Sir Philip's armour, and in the windows, as in the south chapel, are fragments of old glass. This Dame Ellen who built the "neat chappel of stone," "with two brave monuments for herself and husband," also erected the "stately stable" which still stands by the Hall. This stable

and the remaining portion of the old hall are fine bits of seventeenth-century work, the high-pitched gables of the latter being particularly picturesque.

There are other monuments, some of them older than the chapel; there are incised slabs in memory of Sir John and his wife, who died in 1515 and 1529, Sir John having been knighted in the French wars, and of "Philipe Meynwaringe" and Anne, bearing date 1573. Beneath these figures is the epitaph:—

Lyke as this marble doeth hyde
the bodies of theisse twayne,
So shalt not thou on earth lyve longe
but turne to dust agayne.
Then learne to dye and dye to lyve
as theisse two heare example gyve.

I hope the example was better than that given by Sir John, the knight who lies by his dame just outside this chapel, for this is the same Johes Maynwaryng de Peve who in 1428—the year before his marriage—was indicted along with several others for divers "tustles" and breaking the peace.

The heads of these gentry recline on the family crest, an ass's head, and the same crest decorates the tombs and windows with the motto, "Devant si peut." A Mainwaring, the story goes, had his horse killed under him in the Crusades; nothing daunted, he procured the only steed he could find, an ass, and exclaiming that he would not be left behind, urged the unwilling beast to the fray. This is the tradition, but I fancy it is more probable that the Nazarenes took for their crest the humble animal upon which our Lord entered Jerusalem.

In old legal documents the spelling of family names was very varied; in Dugdale's collection of the Mainwaring papers the name is spelt in 131 different ways. This reminds one of the Yankee who complained about the strange spelling and pronunciation of our English titles: "You spell a name B-E-A-U-C-H-A-M-P and call it 'Chumley.'"

About 1600 Sir Peter Leycester, the great Cheshire historian, and Sir Thomas Mainwaring had a long dispute about a legal question with regard to Amicia, a common ancestor. No less than sixteen books and pamphlets were published, now gathered together and reprinted as the *Amicia Tracts*.

Two famous wights, both Cheshire knights,
Thomas yclep'd and Petre;
A quarrel had, which was too bad,
As bad as is my metre.

Neere kinsmen were they, yet had a great fray,
Concerning things done quondam;
I think as long since as Will Rufus was Prince
E'en about their great-great-grandam.

Bicycles are not allowed in Higher Peover Park, so I return to the "Whipping Stocks," where mine awaits me, and ride down the Holmes Chapel Road as far as Rudheath and Allostock, once the home of the Grosvenors.

Very different is the modern farm—Hulme Hall—which stands on the site of the old Manor House from the stately pile of Eaton where the Duke of Westminster now resides. At Allostock, in the little Presbyterian Chapel, the great Lord Clive received part of his education, and judging from the tales handed down of his boyhood's freaks he knew the country round the Heath very well, and no doubt the local gamekeepers and farmers knew him too.

There is still a great deal of delightful uncultivated land at Rudheath, mostly grown with firs now nearly a hundred years old. The little lanes that cross the plantations are sandy and moss-grown, unfit for a bicycle, but there is a good road that runs almost through the heart of the woodland. These firs of Rudheath are full of jays and wood-pigeons; as I ride slowly through, the harsh grating scream of the former and the soft "take two coos-taffy" of the latter strike my ear repeatedly. The blackcock lingered at Rudheath long after it had been

exterminated elsewhere, and old men in the district remember how they used to shoot it from its roost by the light of a lantern. The rough, heather-clad, more open parts are great places for nightjars; "jenny-spinners," the natives call them from the resemblance of the churr to the whirr of the spinning-wheel. The name has clung to the birds long after the last spinning-wheel was broken into firewood.

Rudheath was one of the three sanctuaries for outlaws and evil-doers in the county. Here the squatter might live for a year and a day, safe from the tax-gatherer and constable, if he could raise his house in a night.

> No hearth the fire, no vent the smoke receives,
> The walls are wattles, and the covering leaves;
> For, if such hut, our forest statutes say,
> Rise in the progress of one night and day,
> (Though placed where still the Conqueror's hests o'erawe
> And his son's stirrup shines the badge of law,)
> The builder claims the unenviable boon,
> To tenant dwelling, framed as slight and soon
> As wigwam wild.

The booths and tents of the original lawless inhabitants have all gone now, though it is but a short time since the place bore a bad name. Long after regular outlaws had ceased to exist, the district was peopled by rough uncouth folk who earned their living in various ways until they were caught and sent to gaol. When there was a tax on salt the Rudheathians were famous salt-smugglers; it is even stated that the village hearse carried many a load of salt on which no duty was paid. The dejected looking mourners followed the "corpse" till they could transfer their cargo to some safer vehicle, for once far away from the "wyches" the lumbering market-cart would not be examined by the exciseman.

At the "Three Greyhounds" I turn back in the direction of Knutsford, for I have only gone thus far out of my way to visit this last reminder of the old forest laws of feudal days. Rud-

heath, like the New Forest, carries us back to the Norman hunters and the few privileges they granted to those who were governed by their inequitable game laws.

A straight road brings us to Lower or Nether Peover, and turning up a cobbled lane which leads into the yard of the inn —famous for its home-brewed ale—we are opposite one of the

Lower Peover.

prettiest old churches in the county. Lower Peover is a charming little village; there is a patch of grass—the village green—with a smithy and tiny post-office, little lanes leading here and there, with attractive cottages and a wooden bridge across the trout stream, Peover Eye. There is a mill, with a marshy osier-bed where the black-headed bunting and sedge warbler chatter and sing, and a few old farms. But the real

beauty of the place is centred in the church. First there is the church itself, with its sixteenth-century tower, and its timber and plaster two hundred years older still; in fact some of the huge oak beams inside are supposed to date back to 1296. Then there is the inn whose front gate opens on the churchyard; though considerably altered of late years, still a picturesque building. And alongside the inn is the school-house which was built by the Rev. R. Comberbach in 1710 on land given by Sir Francis Leicester.

Inside, the church is even more interesting than from the outside. The old timbers are a study in themselves; the pews have doors, many of them decorated with the crest of the Shakerleys, which do not open from the floor but are raised so as to keep the draught from the feet of the worshippers. In the Hulme Chancel are the memorials of the Shakerleys; among them that to Sir Geffrey, who, when the battle of Rowton Heath was raging, undertook to carry an important message to King Charles who was watching the battle from the walls of Chester. The Parliamentarian soldiers seemed to be everywhere, and the only way to reach the city was by crossing the river. No boat, however, was forthcoming, so Sir Geffrey embarked in a tub and ferried himself across with a batting staff for an oar, his horse swimming by his side. What the message was I do not know, but it is stated that if Charles had allowed him to take back an answer, as he offered to do, the result of the battle might have been different; but the king wavered and wasted time; Poyntz, who was hard pressed, rallied, and the Royalist cavalry were utterly routed.

The ancient church chest at Peover is a magnificent example of a "dug-out"; it is even better than the one from Grappenhall which is now preserved in the Warrington Museum. It is dug out from a solid oak trunk, and the lid is a ponderous weight. When the maidens of Lower Peover desired to be married, so 'tis said, they were required to try their strength on this chest. If with one hand (some say the left one) they

could raise the lid and throw it back, they were fitted for the hard work of a farmer's wife. It is as much as I can manage to lift it with two hands; I rather pity the poor farmer who happened to marry a damsel with a hot temper who had passed the required standard.

In the graveyard, where there are many old tombs, there is one inscription which is so simple yet so suggestive that I cannot refrain from mentioning it. "Peaceable Mary Fairbrother" is all it says, but it implies volumes.

In a quiet corner of this quiet churchyard is another grave where rests a man that Cheshire may well be proud of, John Byrne Leicester Warren, third and last Baron de Tabley. He combined the highest accomplishments of the naturalist and the poet; I know no poetry that describes nature better than his. Le Gallienne truthfully says he wrote "living poetry." As I stand looking at his grave some visitors come up. "Ah!" says one, pointing to the bramble that gracefully trails across the tomb, "See how soon the dead are forgotten! Even the brambles are allowed to grow!" Even the brambles, forsooth! This bramble is one of the rarest and most beautiful of the brambles he so much loved; it was placed there by loving hands in memory of his favourite study. On the headstone is a verse from one of his own poems:—

> Peace! There is nothing more for men to speak;
> A larger wisdom than our lips' decrees.
> Of that dumb mouth no longer reason seek,
> No censure reaches that eternal peace,
> And that immortal ease.

Listening to the senseless remark of the visitor, some other lines of Lord de Tabley's come into my head:—

> When I am clear of human kind
> And slumber with the patient dead,
>
> Give me a fragment of regret,
> Bring me some silly wayside flower.

To some perhaps the bramble is but a "silly wayside flower;" but others realise that no fitter emblem could *live* upon his grave than one of the plants he cared for most.

A straight road, roughly parallel to Peover Eye, runs to Plumbley Station and then to Watling Street once more. At the corner is the "Smoker," which, though really named after a racehorse whose picture swings on the signboard in front, is an excellent place to stop for a meal and a smoke. But a short distance away is the water-meeting where Peover Eye and the Smoker Brook join to form Wincham Brook; Smoker Brook, under the names of Arley and Waterless Brook, flows out of Arley Pool and receives a stream from Tabley Lake, for Tabley Park lies hard by.

Nether Tabley is one of the most interesting places in the county, both from its historical associations and its natural attractions. Tabley House was built by Sir Peter Byrne Leicester, who when he married Meriel, daughter and heiress of Sir Francis Leicester, added the name of Leicester to that of Byrne. It is a fine mansion, built in the reign of George II., with a curved double staircase and terrace for the garden approach and a courtyard and extensive stables and offices. Beyond the gardens is the park with its two pools, where, on an island on the lower lake, stands the Old Hall and Chapel, treasured relics of the past. The Hall dates back to 1380, when it was built by John Leycester, a descendant of Sir Nicolas de Leycester, seneschal to Henry de Lacy, Earl of Lincoln and Constable of Cheshire in the reign of Edward I. On the south-west side of the building are what are probably the original timbered gables, and in the great hall, the central room where all dined together, are timbers which might well be older than this; in fact some authorities think that the house was altered from an earlier one still. Sir Peter Leycester, the famous Cheshire historian and antiquarian, who, in the middle of the seventeenth century, altered and restored the then crumbling building, tells us, however, that

the former seat of the family was a short distance from this spot.

Sir Peter saved the Hall from destruction, for he says that it "without repayre cannot stand longe," and about the same time built the chapel, where services are regularly held to-day. Inside the Old Hall is much of interest and beauty: a handsome carved chimney-piece, bearing the date 1619, takes the place of the open fireplace of earlier days, and the oak Jacobean staircase and the rarely carved old furniture leave the place much as it was when Sir Peter lived in it; it is, as Henry Greene says, "preserved, as it ought to be, with a reverent care."

On an island in the larger pool is a round tower which figures in paintings of the lake by Turner, for the first Baron de Tabley was a true patron of art, singling out Turner and many others as men who had power long before their names were known to the public. On this little island the Canada geese nest in some numbers, and opposite, in a clump of trees on the edge of the lake, is one of the two remaining Cheshire heronries. About twenty pairs of herons nest annually in these trees—mostly chestnuts—for in Tabley Park they find security and peace; it is a fine sight to see the great broad-winged birds flying to and from their nests or standing like grey-backed warriors on the sward. In an old diary of a servant of Sir Francis Leicester is the remark, "The Swan dyed." Swans were evidently not so common then as now; a pair or two nest regularly here, and in the late summer, when the broods can fly, large numbers gather on the waters, for, like the herons, they find Tabley a safe refuge.

We saw at Lower Peover the grave of the last Baron de Tabley: everything about Tabley is associated with the late lord. His *Flora of Cheshire*, published by his sister, Lady Leighton Warren, the present owner of Tabley, is a model of a county flora. He was not only a painstaking, systematic,

scientific botanist but also a true field naturalist; nothing

The Bramble Garden, Tabley.

missed his keen eyes—he knew what he saw and saw what others did not see. Any one who has searched his *Flora*

for localities will know many place-names in the park and district; these names now have special significance. Here is the Garden Wood, the Round Wood, and Botany Bay; here is the Serpentine where the buckbean still grows and where

> The water-rail
> Cheeps from the mere befringed with galingale.

By the side of the moat-like pool that surrounds the Old Hall, where the evergreens hang over the water, the dabchick builds its wet floating nest; in the great reed-bed on the lake the reed-warblers fix their hanging homes to the swinging stems. On these waters the tufted ducks linger far into the spring—perchance some may even stay to breed, and the teal in safety brings off its young. The heron and the otter live here in peace: the big bream they capture are not grudged them. Tabley is a sanctuary—would there were more like it!—for bird and beast and flower, where they can live their little lives unharmed by man.

In the garden there is one spot especially interesting. Lord de Tabley can hardly be said to have made a special study of brambles, he studied all plants so carefully, but he took perhaps more than ordinary interest in the bramble family: one part of the grounds was set aside as a bramble garden, where all the different species could be watched and studied. When he ceased to reside at Tabley this garden was unfortunately destroyed, but Lady Leighton Warren has with great care restored it as nearly as possible to its former condition. It was touching to find that many of the farmers had carefully preserved from destruction the particular bushes from which Lord de Tabley used to obtain his cuttings, and Lady Leighton Warren was thus able to replace some of the actual plants which had grown in the garden.

I have spoken of Lord de Tabley's poetry; in this, his own country, fragments of his verses constantly come to mind. Perhaps in this very bramble garden he framed—

The dunnock trills a hesitating flute
And bramble-berries lure the burnished fly.

In the lane that runs near Sudlow Farm may have been his "hedge."

There bindweed lilies cupped in roseate dew,
And bryony's polished leaves tuft vine-like fruit,
And purple-stemmed the honeysuckle grew,
With intertwisted amatory shoot.

And here the dragon-fly in glory is
Moving in mailed array a burning star,
And like a white-veiled nun the clematis
Peeps on the world behind her cloister bar.

Now gaze across the arum's fiery head,
Which lights the inner hedge up like a torch,
And lo! behold, not fifty yards ahead,
A gabled cottage with a bowery porch.

As the swifts circle above the lake, I call to mind his description:—

Like a rushing comet sable
Swings the wide-winged screaming swift.

And I never see the evening gatherings of starlings without recalling—

As starlings mustering on their evening tree,
Some blasted oak full in the sunset's eye,
And over all the mead the vibrating
Hiss of their chatter deepens.

The old ruin of an oak tree near the Sandhole in Tabley Park, where Lord de Tabley had so often watched the starlings and the sunset, has fallen, but the birds still muster on autumn evenings in a forest veteran hard by.

Tabley Park, like many other places in the county, is closed to the public; and why? The answer is, more's the pity, that it is the public's own fault. I am a cyclist myself, but that does not prevent me from declaring that a large, a very large

number of people who cycle do not know how to behave themselves. Cycling has taken people into the quieter parts of the country, where, at first, they were well received; but, alas! they abused privileges, recklessly and wantonly destroyed natural beauties, disturbed quiet places and folk by their noise and insults, and consequently got themselves disliked. The result is that people who really wish to enjoy nature, and to visit places of interest, are shut out. Tabley Old Hall is not a place for rowdy men and girls to go to, sitting in the old chairs to see what they feel like, picking the flowers in the garden, or throwing cigarette ashes and matches about. Lady Leighton Warren does not keep the place private from any selfish motives: of her kindness and courtesy to any one really interested in antiquities and nature I can vouch from personal experience; no one with any sense, however, can blame her for putting restrictions upon people who only wish to joke and jeer at the dead, and who visit a place just to have "a day out."

There is another reason why Tabley is private, and with this also I have the greatest sympathy; Lady Leighton Warren wishes the place to be what she has succeeded in making it, a harbour of refuge for wild creatures and plants, where birds may nest without fear of their eggs being robbed, where the rabbit and squirrel need not fear that they will be stoned, and where rare plants can grow without danger of being dug up. There are two ways of saving our antiquities, our fauna, and flora. The best way is for visitors, cyclists in particular, to behave themselves decently and to honour the property of other people; also to treat the flowers and birds with like consideration. If they will not do this they must submit to be shut out from many beautiful and interesting spots, and the more places that are closed before irreparable harm is done the better.

CHAPTER V

THE SALT COUNTRY

Leaving the hospitable "Smoker" after a night's rest I ride towards Northwich, but a few hundred yards down the road make another digression by taking the first turning to my left. A narrow lane leads to Holford Mill, where Peover Eye widens out and forms a pleasantly tree-shaded pool above the mill, and a few yards further is Holford Hall, an ancient manor house.

Holford Hall is a good deal changed, even in recent times; though the moat is dry the moat-bridge remains with circular bays containing stone seats, where one can sit and enjoy the summer evenings. Only the central part of the old Hall remains: a lath and plaster wing—a bit of fine work dating back to 1625—fell suddenly one night. Fortunately the inhabitants of the house had warning, sundry cracks and creaks led them to expect a collapse, but they had not thought it would be so sudden. I saw the Hall a few days after the accident, now many years ago, and was much struck with the complete destruction: when old timbers, rotten through and through, give way, and there is nothing between them but wattles or lath and ancient plaster, the ruin may well be complete.

Mary Cholmondeley had but recently rebuilt the Hall when James I. paid his celebrated visit to Cheshire. She was the

widow of Sir Hugh Cholmondeley, and was the heiress of her father, Christopher Holford of that ilk. She gained a title from the gay monarch of "The bold ladie of Cheshire," some say because she fought her lawsuits so well, and others, and most probably the real reason, because of her prowess in the

Holford Hall.

hunting-field, joining in her widowhood in all the country sports. The story that she earned the title by daring to argue with Queen Elizabeth is tradition and nothing more; she would have been bold indeed had she dared to join issue with Queen Bess.

After returning to the road, and crossing the Eye once more, the country begins to change in character; it is still Cheshire, but by no means rural Cheshire, for we are approaching the "black country" of the county, the great Salt District.

The fields lose their freshness, the grass does not seem so green, and everywhere the ragwort flourishes. Here, there, and everywhere are chimneys, not very tall, for stumpy chimneys are safest near Northwich and easiest to rebuild; many of these are woefully out of plumb, and all look as if they required new pointing. The cottages by the roadside and in the deep wheel-rutted lanes are mean and dirty; the children that play in the high-road, little heeding the traffic, do not look so bright and healthy as in the more rural parts. The outskirts of Northwich are not attractive.

Leland says, "Northwych is a prati Market Towne, but fowle," and as I approach nearer to the town I notice black wreaths of smoke hanging over thick clusters of chimneys and strange wooden erections with what might be called wooden caps above them. The throb of distant machinery, the pulsation of steam pipes, and the rumble of heavy waggons tells me that business is in full swing; yet many of the works around seem almost in ruins, and the great spoil banks of alkali products, and even the heaps of cinders, coal, and other useful commodities, add to the desolation of the scene. Yet Northwich, in spite of the depression in the salt trade, is a busy thriving place, and some of the many works are coining money. Half of the dilapidation of Northwich is not caused by poverty, but by the exceeding difficulty of keeping the houses in an upright condition, for the ground beneath the whole district is unstable. As a matter of fact, the condition of the town is not nearly so bad as it was; sad experience has caused property owners to search for means of holding their houses together, and the result is that half-timbering is brought up to date. All modern built houses in and around Northwich are more than half-timbered, they are frame houses, the timber

framework holding the bricks and mortar together. When the land sinks, as it frequently does, the house *in toto* is raised, and fresh foundations are put underneath; and in many cases the roadway itself has been raised again and again. The older houses exhibit numerous cracks and ghastly wounds in their brickwork, which are frequently filled in with new bricks and mortar, while iron bolts and bars hold the unsteady tenements together. In some of the poorer streets the windows and doors are a study, being wholly devoid of right angles; a doorway, an irregular parallelogram, leans to the right, while the window next it, an inebriated rhomboid, falls gracefully towards the left. Parallel and equal-angled are not terms applicable to Northwich.

It is only fair to say that Northwich possesses many good buildings, for Sir John Brunner, and other public-spirited men who have made their money literally out of this district, have not stinted their wealth in improving the town. Salt has ruined Northwich, but salt rebuilds it as fast as it falls; nay, even faster, for the town is spreading and growing, and the new buildings are a great improvement on the old.

The question of subsidences above the salt strata is a serious one in many parts of Cheshire; some of these sinkings are very old, but at Northwich they only appear to have been noticed during the last century. Ormerod, who published his *History* in 1819, speaks of slight subsidences, but in the Lysons' *Magna Britannia* the subject is not even mentioned; their work was brought out in 1810, though of course written somewhat earlier. Brine springs were known in very early days; the brine was collected and the salt extracted by evaporation by the Romans. Soon after the days of the Normans, perhaps even before, Cheshire salt was carted and hawked round the country, so that the "wyches" have been places of great importance from far-off days. It was not, however, until 1670 that "the rock or fossil salt, from which the brine springs derive their virtue," was discovered at Marbury, close to

Northwich. Then mining for salt was commenced, and it is said the worst subsidences have been caused by the excavation of rock salt. It seems that when the salt, which in places is found in seams of a considerable size, is being cut away pillars of rock-salt are left *in situ* to support the roof. Then when the workings are empty, water is either turned in or allowed to collect in the gallery, and the pillars are dissolved. Then comes trouble. This is not the only cause of the sinkings, for they occur in places where no rock is taken out, but where the brine springs have been pumped. Whatever the actual cause may be, the effect is very evident. There was a little streamlet named Witton Brook which flowed into the Weaver, now, on the right as we enter the town, there is a great sheet of water where big steamboats come from the navigable river, and where grebes and gulls delight to fish. Witton Brook, as this lake is still called, is one of the most striking of all the Cheshire subsidences.

On Saturday and Sunday the angling fraternity resort to Witton Brook, where they moor their boats to stumps and sit watching two, three, or half-a-dozen floats. They are a patient and long-suffering class, these brothers of the rod, for I have many times watched them here, but never seen them catch a fish. Fish there are, I know, for I have seen small bream and roach lying dead on the shore, poisoned by some specially nasty chemical refuse that has been tipped in, for Witton is a great tip for the alkali works; and the crested grebes, dabchicks, and black-headed gulls would not come here for nothing. The local sportsmen, too, shoot on the brook. One day it was recorded in a Manchester evening paper that an "albatross" had been killed here. Wishing to know what strange fowl had been slain, I journeyed down to Northwich and sought the ancient mariner. The bird had been destroyed, but not before its photograph had been taken, and the picture was undoubtedly that of a mature great black-backed gull.

Nixon, the Cheshire prophet, it is said, foretold the ever-

broadening flood of Witton, for he predicted that Northwich should be destroyed by water. Ultimately, no doubt, that will be the fate of a great part of the present prosperous salt district, for at Winsford, between Davenham and Lach Dennis, and in sundry other places, large sheets of water are growing year by year. Fortunately salt is not being pumped in all the places where there are brine springs.

William Smith, the Elizabethan historian, says Northwich "is a proper town," and so I think it is as I ride slowly through the badly-paved streets, ringing my bell repeatedly, for the inhabitants of the place, perhaps warned by long experience, seem to think that the middle of the road is safer than the shelter of the somewhat rickety houses. Crossing the Weaver by one of the swing bridges, I mount the hill by the Hollow Way, where the ancient Castle Northwych, the home of Saxon lords, kept watch and ward over the town. Nothing is left of the castle now save the name and perhaps a few slight traces of the earthworks, but from its position it must have been a place of great strength.

Northwich was a garrison of the Parliament, fortified by Sir William Brereton, in the Civil Wars. Here this generally victorious leader was defeated, but he afterwards regained possession of the town. There was a man "of the contrary sort," as Webb would say, who was born in Northwich: Sir John Birkenhead was Royalist to the backbone. He was a poet and a wit, a man with a ready tongue and a fertile brain, and, it is affirmed by his enemies, no conscience; but he was a literary man of some importance, for in his newspaper *Mercurius Aulicus* he boasted that he kept the kingdom informed of the doings of the Court at Oxford. He suffered many slights and not a few persecutions until the Restoration, when he got his knighthood and other rewards.

A little to the north of Northwich is Winnington Hall, once a residence of Sir John Stanley; close to it a bridge crosses the Weaver leading to the village of Barnton, on the Runcorn

road. Winnington Bridge was the scene of the last battle of the Civil War. Sir George Booth, afterwards Lord Delamere, angered no doubt by being turned out of Parliament by Pride's Purge, and holding strong Presbyterian principles in opposition to the Independents, saw fit to shift his ground and join the Cavaliers. Entering into correspondence with many other disaffected gentry of Lancashire and Cheshire, a rising, known as the "Cheshire Rising," was arranged in July 1659. Sir George, in command of a large body of men, took possession of Chester, though he failed to take the castle. Lambert, however, had just returned from Ireland, and the opposing forces met at Hartford. Booth's army retired from hedge to hedge, "a strange spirit of fear being upon them, which quite took off their chariot wheels," and his cavalry getting into difficulties in the narrow lanes which led down to the bridge, suffered complete defeat at the hands of Lambert's troops. Shortly after this Booth himself was captured, disguised in woman's clothes, but though he was obliged to escape in this attire, Lambert pays tribute to the gallant way in which Sir George and his followers opposed him.

From Northwich I ride to Hartford, where I turn south towards Davenham, which place disputes with Bostock the honour of being the centre of Cheshire. William Smith says that Davenham steeple "standeth in the very middest of Cheshire, so near as I can guess, it may, peradventure, lack an inch or more"; while an old proverb or saying declares that this steeple is the centre within three barleycorns. The old oak stump, which for centuries had stood at Bostock as the "Centre of Cheshire," more than a mile south of Davenham, was cut down in 1887, for it threatened to fall upon the passers-by. Canon Hayhurst and Colonel C. H. France-Hayhurst planted an oak in Jubilee year to take its place; it is to be hoped it will live as long as its predecessor, as the Colonel remarked.

Within half a mile of Middlewich stands Kinderton Hall,

close to the supposed site of the Roman town of Condate, to which runs Kind Street, the fine Roman road which we crossed at Stretton and saw at Wilderspool. The Hall is modern; the old building was pulled down nearly two hundred years ago; yet the place is famous, for it was the seat of the Venables, Barons of Kinderton.

The names of Gros Venor and Venables (Venator-abilis) betoken the fame of these Norman gentry in the hunting-field; the former family is descended from the famous Hugh, first Earl of Chester, and the latter from Gilbert, first cousin of the Conqueror. Gilbert, it is stated, fought at Hastings, and his descendants throughout were a warlike crew.

Sir Hugh Venables was constable of Cheshire, and claimed, amongst his other rights, the gallows, pillory, tumbril, and thew. Why did Sir Hugh want these gruesome articles? Why! because there were sundry pickings to be had when a culprit was executed. The unfortunate felon was to be sent to Chester and there tried according to the law. If he was found guilty, the Earl, who governed by the right of Sword, was to have certain perquisites, and the Baron of Kinderton the rest—his carts and ploughs, the best of his beasts of burden and horned cattle, a portion of his malt and grain, and any other things that he—the baron—fancied. When the lord of the manor waxed fat on such proceeds of "justice," it is not very surprising that most culprits were found guilty. Methinks the gallows were more frequently used than the pillory and thew.

It was a son of this Sir Hugh, I fancy (though I am open to correction), one Sir Richard Venables, who was beheaded at Shrewsbury after the defeat of Hotspur and Glyndwr by the Cheshire archers under Henry, Earl of Chester. He tasted of the rough justice of the day; little it mattered to him that he suffered on the more aristocratic block, and not on his father's gibbet. Another member of the family, Thomas Venables, distinguished himself in a more glorious fight, for, like More of

More Hall, he went out single-handed and slew a fierce dragon in the swamps of Moston. Of this more hereafter, when I visit the scene of the memorable conflict.

Middlewych is a pretty town,
Seated in a valley,
With a church and market cross
And eke a bowling alley.
All the men are loyal there;
Pretty girls are plenty;
Church and King, and down with the Rump,
There's not such a town in twenty.

So says the old Royalist song, and in those warlike days towns sided with their various Squires. Nantwich was as Puritan as Middlewich was loyal, and Nantwich and Middlewich came to loggerheads in March 1642.

I suppose Middlewich may have been a pretty town then, though Dr. Johnson speaks of it as "a mean old town, without any manufactures, but, I think, a corporation," and as I pass the great saltworks and enter the winding uneven streets, lined with small houses and with rows and rows of poor-looking cottages branching off the highway, I am not greatly enamoured of the place. There is too much of the *wych* about it. As at Northwich, the great salt and alkali trades have brought much wealth, but also much squalor and poverty in their wake; and they certainly have not improved the scenic beauty of the district.

Let us recall that Sabbath morning of March 12, when Sir Thomas Aston and his "partie in Chester, recovering strength after their late overthrow, exercised the same in mischiefe, and all wicked outrages." Marching from Chester, Aston's troops plundered and devastated till they came to Middlewich, where even the loyalty of the town did not apparently stop their excesses. Sir William Brereton, one of Cheshire's sturdiest "rebels," was at Northwich, and the Roundhead gentry at Nantwich sent word to him of the approach of the King's

forces. He was, says the Parliamentarian pamphlet of the day, "as forward as we."

At eight o'clock on the Monday morning Brereton was within four miles of the town, approaching towards Wheelock Bridge, while a flanking party was sent round to attack Wallwich Bridge. For three or four hours the Roundheads pounded at the town, until, owing to an accident, they ran short of ammunition, and some of the officers urged a retreat. But Brereton was not of that mould; he "was resolute not to retreat, but to send to Northwitch for more powder, and to keep them in play as well as they could till the powder came, which accordingly they did." Close on noon the powder and the Nantwich forces arrived, and Sir William was rejoiced by hearing his allies "in hot service on the other side of the town."

"The enemy had chief advantages," says the Parliamentary pamphlet; "their ordinance planted; we had none; they layd about 150 musquetiers in an hole convenient for them. They layd their ambuskadoes in the hedges, musquetiers in the church and steeple, and had every way so strengthened themselves, that they seemed impregnable; but God lead on our men with incredible courage." . . . "This was no discouragement to our men; they marched upon all their ambuskadoes, drave them all out of them into the towne, entered the towne upon the mouths of the cannon and storme of the muskets, our Major (a right Scottish blade) brought them up in two files, with which he lined the walls, and kept that street open, went up to their ordinance which he tooke; then the enemy fled into the Church; Sir Thomas Aston would have gon after them but they durst not let him in, lest we should enter with him; then he mounted his horse and fled . . . we slew divers upon the top of the steeple, and some, they say, within the Church."

It was a complete rout, this battle of Middlewich, for a letter of Sir Thomas Aston's, written four days later, confirms the

main particulars. According to his own account he was brave enough, but his men, especially the Welsh, were cowardly and useless. When Brereton was advancing Aston sent the Welsh to line the hedges, but they "advanced so unwillingly" that he had to send two troops of cavalry to face the enemy in a narrow street, where, within "half musket shott," many of them fell. Captain Massie's foot were wavering at Wallwich Bridge, and more horse were sent to cover their retreat. "That avenew, being the street end toward Booth lane, which was well advantaged by ditches and bankes on both sides, which, with the addition of some small trenches that they presentlie made, were convenientlie defensible, but for those that would have staid in them." This was the place the Nantwich forces were approaching, and Aston withdrew some of his foot to allow the horse to charge; but the Nantwich men steadily advanced, routing the Royalists out of the trenches and from behind the hedges, and lining them themselves to "gall the horse." "Our muskettiers and the lieutenant who commanded them," adds Aston, "after the first fire given on them, fell down and crept awaie, leaving their armes." Then all seemed to get into confusion. Aston recalled the horse, making them wheel to allow his guns "to scoure the street," but all to no avail. In despair Aston brought up the train-bands, "but these, as soon as they were up neare to where the cannon was pointed, laide themselves all downe in a sort of hollow way, and their arms by them so that I was forced to ride amongst them, and beate them up, and myselfe on horseback brought them up to the hedge where the other musketry were, but neither these nor those durst put up their heads, but shott their pieces up into the air." Poor Aston! "All men there must witness that I stayed them per force, standing fully exposed to shotts till the cannon was brought off," he says in vindication of his character.

When he turned to Booth Lane he found that all had "clearly run awaye," leaving their trenches, "having never dis-

charged a shott, nor even seene their enemie." Hastening in an "orderlie retreat" to the churchyard, he found "all the foote wedged up in the church, like billets in a wood pile, noe one man at his arms," while his horse in the narrow streets "were in the condition of a sheepe in a penn, and quite exposed to slaughter." Aston ordered the horse to escape towards Kinderton and fall on the rear of the enemy, but horse and foot were completely demoralised, and finding himself left alone with his useless guns, for he says "I could not draw out ten musketeers from the church" (to save the guns) "if it would have saved the world," he fled after the cavalry. In the cross lanes at Kinderton he got lost, finding but a few stragglers, for his gallant cavalry were spurring northward towards Warrington. So ended Middlewich Battle, a great day for Cromwell, a bad one for King Charles, and a very bad one, indeed, for Sir Thomas Aston, who was for ever disgraced.

There is not much real country between Middlewich and Winsford; in fact, till I get through Over, it is all more or less salt-district; from Winsford Station to Salterswall is practically one long town. Along the Weaver, north of Winsford, I see the smoke and grime from the brine-pans spoiling the country side; for, in spite of the depression in the salt trade, there seems plenty of business stirring.

On the left, on entering Winsford, is a great sheet of water lying in the river valley. But a tiny pool on the old ordnance map, it is now a lake of considerable size; for, like Witton Brook at Northwich and the grebe-haunted pond at Davenham, this is a "flash." Brine-pumping at Winsford has caused a depression in the land; the ground has sunk, widening the valley till the two big lakes, the Top and Bottom Flashes, have been formed. The Weaver flows through them, and some day they will be but one sheet of water, for the natives say that they are growing still, a fact confirmed by comparing the present size with that shown on the map of 1881. There are many fine modern buildings—schools, clubs, institutes, etc.—

in Winsford, which prove that the men who have made money out of the town have not been stingy about spending it on improvements. The name of Verdin figures as prominently here as Brunner does in Northwich.

"Ouver," says William Webb, in King's *Vale Royall*, "standeth on the east end of Delamere Forest, not far from the River of Weever, and is but a small thing: yet I put it here, because of the great prerogative that it hath. For it hath a maior; and the church (which is a quarter of a mile south of the town) is lawlesse." Of the dauber mayor of Over we have already heard; of the church there is another story. In spite of its nearness to the depressing salt-works Over Church stands well. It is a venerable structure, with a fine square tower, set on the top of the hill overlooking the Bottom Flash; it is quite a journey from the long hilly street that forms the town.

Once the church, it is said, stood in the town itself. The Devil, who appears to have had a special spite against the Cistercian Abbey at Vale Royal, tore it up from its foundations and flew off with it in his arms. The affrighted monks alternately prayed and cursed but failed to stop him. Suddenly out pealed the Abbey bells, and the Devil, always scared by holy music, dropped his burden. The abbot and his monks, fearing the utter destruction of their beloved building, loudly called upon St. Chad, to whom the church is dedicated; and behold, in answer to their supplications it floated earthward, "light as the breeze-borne thistle-down, soft as a fleece of snow," alighting safely on the spot where it now stands, a mile from its former site.

At the sack of Over, by Sir Thomas Aston's lawless troops, the Puritans affirmed that ratbane was left in the houses "wrapped in paper, for the children, which by God's providence was taken from them before they could eate it, after their parents durst return to them." This may be but a Roundhead tradition, but Sir Thomas, when brought to book for his dis-

graceful defeat at Middlewich, failed to disprove the grave charges of rapine and plunder with which he was charged. There can be no doubt that his cowardly men well deserved the thrashing that they received at the hands of Sir William Brereton.

Over, throughout Cheshire, is famous as the birthplace of Robert Nixon, the Cheshire Prophet. His name, his wonderful foresight, his strange history are well known; but, unfortunately, proof is not only lacking that he was born at Over, but that he was born at all. We cannot pass the town, however, without saying something about him, though I will not go into the evidence, mostly negative, which has been adduced concerning him. De Quincey says he was "one who uttered his dark oracles sometimes with a merely Cestrian, sometimes with a national reference;" and he is asserted by some to have predicted the battle of Bosworth and the Reformation, and by others the Revolution. Oldmixon states that "in the reign of James I. there lived a fool whose name was Nixon," and the earliest account of him appeared in 1714; yet others are equally certain that he was born in the days of Edward IV.

It is stated that he "was a short squab fellow, had a great head, and goggle eyes; that he used to drivel as he spoke, which was very rarely, and was extremely sulky." He was but half-witted, and only spoke when in his mystic trances; he hated children, beating them when they came within his reach; and he hated work, being beaten in turn to make him perform his duty. The first instance of his showing any wonderful powers was when he was driving his brother's oxen. He goaded an ox with great cruelty, and the man who was guiding the plough threatened to tell his master. Nixon replied that it did not matter, for the beast would not be his brother's in three days, and sure enough it was taken for a heriot by the lord of the manor. His local prophecies refer to places I shall visit, and where they are interesting I hope to mention them. His fame soon spread, and the King—it does not signify which—

sent for him, and wished him to reside at Court. Nixon was greatly distressed; he wept and mourned, stating that if he went to London he should be starved. When he arrived at Court the King, having hidden a ring, asked him to find it. Nixon replied, "He who hideth, can find." This greatly struck the monarch, who ordered him to be kept in the kitchen so that there might be no fear of his being starved. Nixon had a great appetite—he could manage a leg of mutton at a sitting—and he became such a nuisance from his habit of "licking and picking at the meat" that on an evil day the cooks locked him in a closet. Here he was forgotten, and his last prophecy came true; he was starved to death. The closet, where he met with his untimely death, is shown in Hampton Court; but alas! for the veracity of the tale, this portion of the building was not built till the reign of William III., disproving part of the story, even if we take Oldmixon's date as correct.

There is much circumstantial evidence about this extraordinary man, and all the older natives have some knowledge of his name. "Aye, we've heard tell of him," they say; but I cannot find any now who actually believe in him. Mr. W. E. A. Axon, who has probably investigated the literature concerning Nixon, more carefully than any other living man, says in one of his articles: "Vaticinations were industriously circulated by the contending parties in the State, and a prophet must have been at least as important as a poet laureate. When the event had falsified the prediction it could easily be altered so as to meet the new exigences of the case. Some of these dusky rhymes found more than one local habitation. The same or similar sayings are attributed to Thomas the Rhymer, to Mother Shipton, and to Robert Nixon. For this reason, whatever be the truth or falsity of the details as to his life, the rhymes of the Cheshire Prophet will remain as curious and interesting documents in the history of the county."

[Nixon said, "Thro' Weever Hall shall be a lone." As it is but a short spin to Weaver I take a turning to the left, just

over the bridge, and soon find myself on a good though undulating cinder track running alongside the Flashes. Passing through several gates I come to the Hall, but it is not the building that Nixon knew, for it is barely 150 years old; in fact it was much altered so recently as 1847. A writer, commenting on Nixon's prediction, says that the two wings of the Hall stand on either side of the road or lane. This may have been so once, but it certainly is not so now; it faces a lane at right angles to the one I have come by. Questioning one of the farm hands, he replies: "Some say yon building was part of th' hall," pointing to a fairly modern granary. "Some say" wrongly, for undoubtedly this outbuilding was erected for a barn, and not for domestic purposes.

What the old Hall was like I do not know, but it was a place of some importance; a residence of the Stanleys, an old Cheshire family, till the middle of the seventeenth century. In the *Cheshire Records* we get an insight into the history of Weaver in the reign of Richard II. Thomas de Vernon and his retainers attacked the house, forced their way in, and after cruel outrages bore away Margaret, widow of Sir Thomas de Caryngton. Even widows were not safe if they had money or property. But the law found Thomas out, and he was tried and found guilty. I do not know if he came within the jurisdiction of the Venables, nor if he was executed in the "gallows field"; but the Barons of Kinderton exercised their privilege of life and death—chiefly the latter—until 1597, when Hugh Stringer, a murderer, had the honour of being the last criminal executed by them.

The Top Flash, through which the river runs, looks very picturesque; here there are no disfiguring salt-works. Waving reeds and beds of green equisetum, in which the black coots are clucking, fringe the edges; black-headed gulls, those inland sea-fowl of Cheshire, float idly in a little bay or sail overhead with harsh cries; and far out a few grebes are swimming. It was hardly fair to say that the salt trade spoils

the scenery, for these fine sheets of water are the direct consequences of brine-pumping. On a Sunday morning in August 1713, when folk were breakfasting in Sabbath peace, the ground suddenly collapsed close to the barns of Weaver Hall. For three days there was a strange rumbling noise, and a chasm two yards wide opened to unknown depths, and gradually widened. This dreadful pit, which the country

Church Minshull.

people thought led to the lower regions, was the commencement of the Top Flash, for it rapidly filled with salt water.

It is a rough grass-grown track that I follow to Swanlow Lane, but from there is a good road to Church Minshull. Raised above the road is a charming "magpie" house, Minshull Mill, one of the prettiest I have seen for some time, and as I turn the corner I find myself in a real old Cheshire village, somewhat spoilt, however, by its church. It is a plain building, rather in the "Bolinbroke" style, erected in the early

days of the eighteenth century, and patched up in places within recent years. Yet there are bits here and there of an older building, especially noticeable on the north side, where a window, door, and the steps leading to the tower staircase are undoubtedly more ancient. There is, too, a very respectable carved skeleton reclining in an uncomfortable position on the side of a tomb, somewhat damaged in various parts of its anatomy by weather and mischief. At the south-east corner, let into the wall, is a fine heraldic monument, with an inscription which recalls the fierce conflict over the Gawsworth property.

> Near this Place lye interred the Bodys of Thomas Minshull late of Eardswick in the County of Chester Esqr. and Alice his wife who was Daughter of James Trollope of Thirlby in the County of Lincoln Esqr. They left two Sons and five Daughters This Monument is Erected by their three Surviving Daughters in Dutiful Remembrance of Parents upright and just in all their ways Both they and their Children Suffered great wrongs by unjust People He was Loyal to his King and True to his Country. His mother was Sister to Sr Edward Fytton of Gawsworth in Cheshire who Suffered for King Charles the first of Blessed Memory.

Suffered great wrongs by unjust persons! The great Cheshire Will Case. For this wife of Thomas Minshull was one of the four sisters of Sir Edward Fytton, who took possession of his Gawsworth property when he died, and who were turned out by William Fitton, Sir Edward's grandson. The quarrel lasted longer than the lives of the "three surviving daughters," and only ended in that memorable duel and murder in Hyde Park, when Lord Mohun and the Duke of Hamilton fell together.

Passing a quaint half-timbered cottage with a projecting gabled room supported on pillars above the doorway, I drop to the Weaver Bridge. At Northwich and Winsford the Weaver is straight-banked, black, and ugly; here it is a delightful stream, winding through a deep valley, wooded and

fertile. Within a few yards of the bridge I stop at a tiny cottage for a meal. Tiny it is, but very charming; for in its old-world garden I find all the herbs that are so delightful—lavender, thyme, and lads-love. I pull a leaf of rosemary and crush it between my fingers to get its full fragrance; the old man sees me, and says:—

"Aye, that's rosemary. We'n used to have that at funerals." And his wife, joining in, tells how they baked biscuits, wrapping one or two in paper sealed with black sealing-wax, with a sprig of rosemary between the folds of the paper. These were given to the mourners—"them that follered the coffin. We kept th' biskit and threw rosemary onto th' coffin."

"There's rosemary, that's for remembrance." I mutter, thinking of poor mad Ophelia.

"Aye, that were it," echoes mine host. And his wife adds that it makes grand tea for weak hearts.

Leaving my cheery hosts I retrace my steps—no, I should say tracks—towards Over, passing away on the left the village of Darnhall, where the monks of Vale Royal were first situated. Webb tell us that they left this spot "because the place, as amongst woods and waters, was not, forsooth, lightsome and pleasant enough for their fat worships." The tenantry of Darnhall, which was still attached to the Abbey, gave them plenty of trouble later, though, judging from the perquisites of the abbot, there was very much to be said on behalf of the oppressed rustics.

Darnhall Manor, for the abbey was not built then, was the scene of a tragedy which resulted in matters of great importance for Cheshire. John Scot, Earl of Chester, married Helen, daughter of Llewellyn, thus bringing peace between the County Palatine and the troublesome Welsh; but he brought worse trouble to himself by this unfortunate match, for his wife "devilishly, like a wicked serpent, plotted his destruction, and by poison brought his life to an end, languishing upon a grievous torment." Doubt has been cast upon the truth of

this, and perhaps the Welsh lady may be maligned, but at any rate John died without issue, and Henry III., before whom Scot had carried the sword of office when he married Queen Eleanor, took to himself the Earldom, giving the sisters of Scot, the legal heiresses, land in sundry places as a sop.

At the corner, where one of the old Over crosses formerly stood, I kept straight on, leaving the main road, which inclines to the left. By the railway is the modern Marton Hall, with the moat hard by that surrounded the old hall and chapel pulled down fifty years ago. Crossing under the line I am on classic ground, for have I not entered Marton or Merton Sands, where the holy friar outwitted the Devil?

An undulating, almost hilly tract of country lies on the right, stretching away to Foxwist Green; not a badly-named place either, for it looks just the place to find a fox, and in fact is in a good fox-hunting district. Sandy hillocks, topped with furze and brambles, and dotted here and there with little spinneys, rise above damp, marshy hollows, where the ever-growing flashes are accumulating their waters. One big flash, where, according to the old map, a farmstead once stood, is white with water crowfoot, and a few quacking mallard are swimming on its weedy surface. Little white-washed thatched cottages perch on the drier slopes; somewhat squalid in appearance, and the inhabitants smack rather of canal barges and salt-pans than of agricultural labour. It is a rough, uncultivated place, full of natural beauty, but neglected and somewhat forlorn.

The Devil came flying over Vale Royal, away over yonder beyond Whitegate, and he saw that Francis, the fat friar, was asleep. Likely game, thought the Devil, and alighted to interview the holy man.

> Oh, Friar, of ale thou shalt wassail thy fill
> If I may be witness to thy last will,
> And all the fat bucks in broad Cheshire are thine
> If here on this parchment thy name thou wilt sign.

And all he wanted was the portly friar's soul. But the wily owner of the abbey was not to be caught with chaff; he sorely wanted the liquor and venison, but he did not quite like the price. He agreed, however, to sign the will and let the old gentleman witness it, but only if he might insert a third condition to be revealed after the signature was duly affixed. The Devil agreed, thinking that he had got the old man fairly within his toils, and when all was settled and witnessed, he asked for the third stipulation.

"Only," said Francis, "that on yonder sands of Merton you shall twine me a dozen hay-bands."

Away skipped his satanic majesty; but no grass could he find long enough to twist, though he searched long and diligently. So, every year, to save the old friar's soul, the inhabitants of Marton gathered together at a festival, and amidst music and dancing and much rejoicing over the defeat of the powers of evil, they ploughed the sands and left them fallow.

Marton Sands have not been ploughed for many years; old customs die sooner than the superstitions that created them. But the country is still but little cultivated, for the soil is unfertile, and the inhabitants are not agricultural. The friar's soul is fairly safe. It is quite safe if the sandy lane up which I laboriously push my machine is the actual spot from which the hay-grass must be gathered.

CHAPTER VI

VALE ROYAL TO FRODSHAM

Close to the straggling hamlet of Foxwist Green six lanes meet in a pleasant little green overshadowed by trees. A field hard by is called Cook Stool, but I cannot discover any reference to the origin of the title. Doubtless, however, in the good old days this spot, being convenient for many parishes, was the scene of much woman-baiting. The cuck-stool or cucking-stool—a seat stuck at the end of a plank that could be raised or lowered at will—was an ingenious contrivance employed throughout Cheshire in the gentle art of repressing the too voluble tongues of scolds. The transgressor was seated in the chair, made fast with cords, and lowered into a pond; sometimes, as we see from an ancient print, with the additional insult and discomfort of the brank upon her head. Thus she was ducked in the dirty water till her ardour was cooled and her too-ready tongue quieted. There certainly was at one time a pit in the field close to the corner, but whether this was the spot where the stool was used I cannot say.

I take the Northwich road at this corner, riding towards Whitegate. Away on the left, down a rather muddy lane, is Bark House, an old farm that claims the honour of being the birthplace of the "Cheshire Prophet." Whitegate and Over both lay claim to Robert Nixon, but as a matter of fact neither of them can show his name in their parish registers. Most of

Nixon's strange prophecies refer to Vale Royal and the Cholmondeleys, so, if there ever was such a man, it is evident he was well acquainted with this district.

After passing through the village of Whitegate, Vale Royal, the seat of Lord Delamere, is on the right—extensive park-land stretching away to the Weaver valley. Vale Royal Abbey is not the original building, though traces of the old home of the Cistercian monks are still preserved.

Strange is the history of the monastery, too long to be given here in full. Edward I., when Prince of Wales and first royal Earl of Chester, was in danger of shipwreck on his return voyage from Palestine. Either in his terror during the storm or when safely landed on *terra firma*, he made a vow that he would return thanks for his escape by founding a convent for the Cistercians. He apparently forgot all about it, or was too busy with the Barons, for it was not until he had again suffered that he remembered his promise. Being imprisoned at Hereford, the monks of Dore visited him, and in return he founded a holy house at Darnhall. Here the monks stayed for a few years until Edward ascended the throne, when he set to work to provide a new permanent home for them.

In the year 1277 the King and Queen Eleanor, with great pomp and majesty, laid the first stone in "Queterne Hallowes." It was a great day, that 6th of August, but probably few of those monks lived to enter the new building. It was not until 1330 that the Abbey was completed and the abbot and his monks left the temporary barracks in which they had resided for fifty-three years during the construction of the stately pile. Some idea of the magnificence of the building can be gathered from the fact that upwards of £32,000 was drawn from the Treasury to pay for the work. This sum, at the present value of money, would build a fine place; what did it mean when money was worth so much more? The abbot of this royal foundation was necessarily an important man; he had many privileges, and ruled all Darnhall, Over, and Weaverham;

having, among other rights, the power of life and death in these towns and villages. The Abbey became, too, a sort of nucleus of the Forest of Delamere.

The monks had not even got into their new building before troubles arose. It is not fair now to say whether they oppressed the people or whether the inhabitants of the surrounding districts thought that their rights were being threatened; but very soon friction between monks and laymen led to personal violence. In 1321 there was a fierce fight just beyond the Abbey lands, when several local families attacked a party of monks. The monks fled, being more fortunate than John Beddeworth, one of the brothers, who, on another occasion in the same year, was captured by the Oldyntons. Party feeling must have run pretty high for they slew the holy man and, shame to say, cut off his head and played football with it.

As years went on the struggle became fiercer. Twice the tenantry at Darnhall and Over rose against their religious masters, and the second time they were only subdued by calling in the aid of the military. Then the abbot was accused of assisting the freebooters of Delamere; in fact, it was suggested that he himself was leagued with the lawless band. The sanctity of the Church saved him in this case from legal proceedings. In 1337 the abbot did appear in a lawsuit, but this time as plaintiff. Sir William de Clifton had been troubling him with regard to his tithes in Lancashire. Sir William, besides collecting the tithes for his own use, had assaulted the rector of Clifton and "maimed his hunting palfrey in a ridiculous manner," and had pulled the unfortunate parish clerk out of the church and flogged him through the streets of Preston. The abbot won his case, and Sir William promised to be good and to "in future, maintain and defend the privileges of the abbey."

There is nothing like a common cause to cure internal feuds. Thus we find an abbot of Vale Royal fighting at the head of his tenantry at Flodden Field; probably all private

wrongs were for the time forgotten, and this bold example of the Church Militant would be beloved and followed through thick and thin. At the Reformation Vale Royal Abbey passed into the hands of Sir Thomas Holcroft, and a new era of its history began.

It is said by those who place Nixon's date in Edward IV.'s reign, that being vexed with the abbot of Vale Royal he foretold the destruction of the institution, saying that it should be a raven's nest. This was supposed to refer to the raven on the crest of the Holcrofts. The same authorities assert that the abbot was slain by Sir Thomas Holcroft, though others affirm that he died quietly in his bed, still in receipt of a small annuity from the Crown, a sop for the robbery of all his income. From the Holcrofts the Abbey passed to the Cholmondeleys, the present owners.

Nixon prophesied an heir to the Cholmondeleys when "an Eagle shall sit on the top of the house." A raven was also to build on a church steeple, a wall was to fall down at Vale Royal, and sundry other weird signs were to bear witness to great political changes. In a curious old tract, the writer, though stating his unbelief in all prophecies, says, "Now as for authorities to prove this prophesy to be Genuine, and how it has hitherto accomplished, I might refer myself to the whole County of Cheshire, where 'tis in every one's Mouth." . . . "As much as I have of the Manuscript was sent me by a man of Sence and Veracity, as little Given to Visions as any body." So the "man of sence and veracity" states that an eagle appeared on Vale Royal house just when an heir was most needed, and gives the evidence of Mrs. Chute, sister to Mrs. Cholmondeley, that "a Multitude of People gathered together to see the Eagle," crying, "Nixon's Prophesy is fulfilled, and we shall have a foreign King!" It was the "biggest bird she had ever seen"; it perched on a bow-window, and she and others tried to scare it away. It refused to budge till the little babe arrived, when after hanging about

in the neighbourhood for three days, but no longer on the house, it disappeared.

Vale Royal runs to eagles. One of the few white-tailed eagles met with in the county was shot at Davenham, but a short distance away; and two out of perhaps half a dozen ospreys which have occurred in Cheshire have been killed on Petty Pool, the beautiful sheet of water in the New Park on the left. There is no record what the eagle was; a sparrow-hawk or a kestrel might easily be magnified into a big bird by superstitious people; neither can we place any faith in the raven which, at the same time, is supposed to have built on Over steeple—not a very likely place for a raven. Sir Thomas Aston also attested to the truth of the signs. He was riding with Mr. Cholmondeley by the side of a wall at Vale Royal when that gentleman said to him:—"Nixon seldom failed, but now I think he will; for he foretold that my Garden Wall would fall, and I think it looks as if it wou'd stand these forty years." "He had not been gone a quarter of an hour before the Wall split and fell upwards against the rising of the Hill, which, as Nixon wou'd have it, was a Presage of a flourishing Church."

One more story of Vale Royal and then I must pass on. As was the case with so many gentlemen's houses, it was the scene of fierce fighting in the Parliamentary wars. A portion was burnt, and the whole was plundered by Cromwell's soldiers, and amongst the loot was a herd of famous white cattle with red ears; they were in fact the breed known for so long as wild white cattle, similar to the park cattle of Lyme and Chillingham. They were driven away by the soldiers for a great distance, but one cow managed to escape, and wandering back to its old home supported the starving family with her milk. "Whatever," says Dugdale "might be the truth, it is certain that her posterity has been preserved from feelings of gratitude; as white cows with red ears, of the very same breed, are still kept at Vale Royal."

This herd, which was domesticated and milked like the only existing herd in Cheshire, that at Somerford, has been extinct many years, though, if we can rely on the 1850 *Cheshire Directory*, it was in existence so late as that date. Without doubt the originals of these park cattle belonged to the monks and probably came with them from Dore, and were not, as is so commonly considered, descendants of a wild breed which once roamed the forests of England.

The road between Vale Royal and the New Park is very sylvan, shaded on either side by fine trees; but it is not so pretty as the track across the Park, which leads by the side of one of the most beautiful of all the Cheshire meres, Petty Pool. I cannot, however, take this undulating park track, for there has been much dispute between Lord Delamere and the Northwich Council about the right of way; Lord Delamere has won his case and the road is closed. So I ride on northward till at Sandiway I strike Watling Street once more. Turning sharply to my left, I descend a long but not too steep hill and find little difficulty in mounting the opposite bank to Sandiway Head. Skimming along on the fine level surface of this highway—one of the best roads in Cheshire—it is hard to realise what Sandiway means; but take one of the forest tracks that lead to the right or left, and you will soon understand what the "pavement" was like when Sandiway was named. At either side of the road itself, a sandy track is still preserved for the use of the horses from the neighbouring hunt stables.

At Sandiway Head there is a hostelry well known to Cheshire hunting men and now to Cheshire cyclists. It is called the "Blue Cap," after a famous hound whose bones rest in a field near. Bluecap won 500 guineas for his master, Mr. Barry, in a speed trial at Newmarket. Great interest was excited in sporting circles by the match between Mr. Barry and Mr. Meynell, and as the stakes were so high much trouble was taken to bring the dogs to perfection. After two months' training, when Mr. Barry's hounds, Bluecap and Wanton, were fed

on oatmeal, milk, and sheep's trotters, and Mr. Meynell's on legs of mutton, the great day arrived, and threescore horsemen prepared to follow the dogs on their drag. Bluecap came in first, Wanton close behind, beating Richmond, Mr. Meynell's hound, by over a hundred yards, while his other dog never finished. Hard riding was popular in those days, and Cooper, Mr. Barry's huntsman, came in first after the dogs, but only twelve of the sixty who started managed to urge their horses to the finish.

"The Blue Cap."

Cooper's mare, it is said, was stone blind when he pulled her up. Mr. Egerton Leigh has left us a memorial of the race.

> Bluecap's remains, his dust and Bone,
> Lie midst that meadow, green and Lone;
> Untired in speed he won his Urn,
> E'en harder than most heroes Earn.
> Cheshire will never fox-hound Call
> Amongst her pack, that better, All
> Perfection, write on Bluecap's Pall.

Daniel, in his *Rural Sports*, does not give the actual speed, but I gather that it was about thirty miles an hour—four miles in eight minutes.

All the roads are good here, for it is the border of the Forest land, and there is not much to chose between the lanes which lead northward to Weaverham, a quaint country town little changed from the time—not a hundred years ago—when two gaily decorated May-poles always stood in the main street, a crooked little street, leading up to the Elizabethan church; I wonder, as I ride through, where the abbot of Vale Royal used to keep his prisoners. Weaverham prison was much used by the powerful abbots of the neighbouring monastery; the court was held here, and the bailiff was kept busy with transgressors against monastic tyranny. When Sir William Venables, smarting under some personal affront, waylaid the abbot on his return journey from visiting Queen Philippa, there was a *fracas* between the disaffected tenantry who had followed Sir William and the retinue of the abbot. The great man's horse was shot under him and he only escaped by the skin of his teeth, many biting the dust on both sides. Then Henry Done, forester of Delamere, arrested many of the Darnhall tenants and put them in the stocks, locking up a number in Weaverham prison to await the abbot's pleasure. This was one of the last and most serious of the troubles between the abbot and his tenantry, but with his usual smartness the abbot came off best; one man at least had to offer up wax tapers yearly for the rest of his life.

Sir Thomas Aston and his lawless troops have been spoken of before. The old pamphlet, the accuracy of which so far as regards the battle of Middlewich Sir Thomas's own letters confirm, informs us that prior to his defeat he plundered Weaverham; "they carried old men out of their houses, bound them together, tyed them to a cart, drave them through mire and water above their knees, and so brought them to that dungeon." Apparently, if Weaverham prison is meant, the gaol was still in use in the middle of the seventeenth century.

Weaverham does not look like a salt town, though brine was worked here before the Conquest.

Being rather anxious to see Crewood, I take the road to Acton Bridge station, where I cross the line. Acton Bridge itself lies to the right, now a swing-bridge across the navigable Weaver. Nixon is said to have declared that Vale Royal and Norton Priories should meet, and the prophecy was supposed to be fulfilled at Acton Bridge; stones from both houses being employed in the construction of the bridge after the Dissolution. This bridge is gone, so that the truth of the assertion cannot be easily proved, but it appears to be quite as likely an explanation of the mythical saws as that railways were foreseen when Nixon spoke of carts going on broad wheels without horses. This last prophetic saying has been attributed to many seers.

Crewood Hall stands in the valley of the Weaver some little distance from any public road; on my map there is a good track marked as far as the house, but somehow I take a wrong turning and am brought up by the gates of a farmyard. A little boy informs me that it lies "o'er t' field," so I push my machine through the cattle-trodden yard and across a faintly marked footpath only to find myself a few minutes later standing without track or direction in the midst of a herd of astonished cows. Whilst I am considering whether to return and try to pick up the path or continue and lift my steed over the hedge, a man comes to my rescue and obligingly points out where I have gone wrong. He is very communicative and tells me how the farmer who lives in Crewood Hall boasts that he sleeps every night in two parishes; he remembers how, when they used to beat the bounds, ladders were borrowed for the schoolboys—always energetic bound-beaters—to clamber right across the roof. Crewood is a substantial farm; it has been this for some hundreds of years; in fact, we may say it has always been a farm, for the Gerards of Crewood, ancestors of the Gerards of Gerard Bromley and the Earls of Macclesfield, were yeomen of the old school. Nothing is left of the old building save a half-timbered doorway with an ancient stone bearing

the arms and initials of the Gerards and the motto, "Jehovah Jireh."

As I stand looking at this inscription on the old doorway of a prosperous modern farmhouse (for there is an air of prosperity in the big farm buildings and the neatly kept gardens and orchards around me) I wonder what induced the builder to use the words. Did the Gerards, or later tenants or owners of the farm, look at this motto when times were bad and take fresh hope? When rinderpest was slaying their cattle and the cattle of their neighbours, did they think that the Lord would provide? When the land was overrun with hungry lawless Royalist and Puritan soldiers, looting the farmsteads for food, did they take comfort from the words? I do not know, but few places I have seen appear to me to better deserve the motto. Standing by itself in the midst of its fruitful fields, prospering apart from the busy haunts of men, a type of the agricultural calling which has made Cheshire so famous, Crewood Hall looks what it is, a good example of the old-established though up-to-date Cheshire farm. Yet the Royalist squib says:—

> If the dee'le had his due,
> Woe to Gerard of Crew.

Kingsley, the original home of the Kingsleys, foresters of Mara and Mondrem, stands on the highroad to Frodsham. It is a long straggling village, a large part of it along the sides of two almost parallel roads, one of which is higher up the hillside than the other. Ranulph de Kingseley, who was master-forester in the reign of Henry I., left three co-heiresses, one of whom married a Gerard and one a Done, to whom Kingsley and the forestership passed. Instead, however, of rejoining the road, I follow the field-path that leads to the Weaver bank, passing some thick pheasant coverts and skirting the river till I reach Cattenhall, another farm which belonged in the latter end of the seventeenth century to Gilbert Gerard of Crewood.

Prior to its sale to Gilbert Gerard, Cattenhall was the property of one of the most celebrated of the Royalist officers, Sir Arthur Aston, son of Sir Thomas Aston of Aston. Clarendon tells us that the King said there "was not in his army a man of greater reputation, or one of whom the enemy had a greater dread." Sir Arthur was a fighting man who seemed to care little for whom he was fighting so long as he could be in the thick of a struggle. I do not imply that he was ever disloyal to his king; he was not, but in his earlier life he seems to have fought in the Continental wars first on one side and then on the other, always earning the highest praise of the prince he was then serving. When the Rebellion broke out Aston left the Thirty Years' War to fight itself to a finish and took command under King Charles. His dragoons fought well at Edgehill, and at Reading he several times defeated the attacks of Essex himself. For some time he was disabled by wounds received in the thick of the fight, and later, through an injury received in falling from his horse, lost his leg. But a wooden leg did not check his loyalty or his fighting spirit though it ended his career, for when defending the town of Tredagh he lost the day. His soldiers were all slain and one of the attacking party beat out the brains of the old soldier of fortune with his own wooden leg.

By keeping near the river I have avoided the long pull up to the ridge of the Overton Hills, but passing the site of the ancient earthworks and riding through Bradley I find a considerable rise to Overton, the village that hangs on the hillside above Frodsham.

The church at Overton is the parish church of Frodsham; it stands well on the hillside, overlooking the "one long street" that Smith talks about, and the wide-spreading marshes of the Mersey beyond, where in winter the wild geese congregate and the fierce little merlin beats up the dunlins and other waders. The view from the churchyard is grand; Halton Castle with Rock Savage and Clifton below it forming the boundary on

the east, and the high lands of Wirral on the west. Ditch-bordered fields, rush-grown patches, and reedy pools stretch along the borders of the river where the smoke of great steamers may be seen passing up and down the canal, and away beyond, across miles of sand or shallow water, is the coast of Lancashire.

The church was mostly rebuilt in 1715; not a good date for architecture, but still it is a grand old building and inside it is exceedingly interesting. The broken remnants of a stone coffin which stand at one side of the church were found beneath one of the pillars of the nave and contained the crumbling remains of a man of gigantic stature. In one corner, hidden away, is a curious inscription in memory of a Frodsham carpenter who died of dropsy in 1749; it is a gruesome memorial throwing a strange light on what was then considered marvellous.

On the board which tells the names of the long list of vicars, for the record is an ancient one, there are two names which catch my eye: Roland Heywood and James Cokayne. Looking back two hundred and fifty years it is hard to realise the internal troubles which in the name of religion harassed this quiet country town. Dr. Heywood, doubtless a good man according to his lights, was driven from the living by the Presbyterians. He lived to see the Restoration but did not return to Frodsham. Then in turn the Puritan was replaced by James Cokayne who was described as an Anabaptist. Little is known of this man, but he must also have been a man of power, for when he quitted the living at the Restoration he left most of his parishioners either of his own persuasion or followers of the "giddy" sect called Quakers.

In those days Anabaptist and Quaker were terms of great reproach, but we know now that many of the men who were so called were really good men, and, like some of the Established Church parsons, some of the Presbyterians, and some of the Independents, were fighting for what they believed

to be the only way of salvation. Doubtless in those days of religious intolerance there were men of all sects who, though guilty of much narrow-minded error, were really honest, God-fearing men.

All traces have now been lost of the castle at Frodsham, which guarded the narrow pass between the hills and the marshes; even so late as 1802 a high tide burst through the restraining embankments and flooded the low land to within one hundred yards of Frodsham street. Above the town are the Overton Hills—the village stands half-way up the slope—and the height overlooking Frodsham is called Beacon Hill. In the eighteenth century this beacon was still in use, and guiding marks led the eye from this eminence to Mow Cop and other hills in Cheshire and Lancashire where in case of danger beacon fires would be lighted.

Great was the excitement in Frodsham when Salisbury, who had conspired with Babington to assassinate Queen Elizabeth, was arrested in the town. He managed to escape from his guards and fled into the depths of the neighbouring forest, but was recaptured next day and paid the penalty of his crimes in London. England was in a state of excitement then; wood was ready in the beacon on Overton Hill; who knew when the King of Spain might not send his fleet? Rumours were rife on every hand, and it was first whispered, then openly announced, that the Spanish fleet was in the Dee, that troops had landed at "the New Key," and that London, Bristol, and Chester were in flames. Eager eyes watched the marks on the hills, till one eventful night a brilliant twinkle lit up the summit of Mow Cop; and at once fires were lighted on Alderley Edge and "the stormy hills of Wales." On that memorable night the beacon flared up above the awe-struck town, and Halton Castle and the Pennine Hills hurried the message north—the Spanish Armada was in sight.

The "Bear's Paw," dated 1632, is the hostelry I make my resting-place in Frodsham. It is one of the most picturesque

and ancient-looking inns in the county; stone-built and gabled, with an archway leading to the backyard and stables, I know no better example of an old coaching inn. To the back premises I wheel my machine and there am amused to find a row of cages, almost a small menagerie, where in one compartment a few white rats are balancing themselves with their tails as they promenade along their perches, and in another a couple of monkeys, deep in the delights of bananas, seem quite at home in the open air. A third cage is tenanted

"The Bear's Paw."

by a surly looking fox; why, he seems to ask, am I shut up here to be gazed at? Very different is the behaviour of two restless badgers, which complete the collection; they trot backwards and forwards, nuzzling about in their food-dish, quite happy with some gravy-soaked potatoes, the remains of a guest's dinner. With placid indifference they glance at me and then trot back to their food-dish, but when a little dog wanders into the yard, their behaviour is very different; bristling up the long hair of their shoulders they give their

natural enemy an exhibition of all their dental arrangement, and fairly leap with all four feet at once in their excitement to be at him.

Nearly a mile away in the direction of Warrington is Frodsham Bridge, really a separate town. There is a different look about this place, it is poorer and dirtier than Frodsham itself. There is something Cranfordian about the air of respectability of Frodsham but the neighbourhood of the bridge smacks more of the flat-trade of the Weaver, and there is also a bone works hard by, never a pleasant erection in a town or village. At Frodsham the bridge is an old one; not the present structure perhaps, for many have spanned the current of the Weaver. The bridge is mentioned in the time of Henry III., and there was then a chapel upon it where passengers might give thanks — and gifts. The first brick bridge was built in the time of Elizabeth. The Frodshamites imagined that their important port might be the landing-place fixed upon by King Philip of Spain, for Frodsham was a port then; yes, and much later, for until the Weaver was made navigable to Northwich and Winsford the river was often crowded with shipping right up to the bridge. Now no boats of any size attempt to sail up to this bridge; a few yards further on a swing-bridge crosses the cut or canal which carries the modern traffic.

The story of the Synagogue Well at Frodsham is thought by many to be mythical; but no other explanation than the legend of a wandering Jew who built the masonry around it has ever been forthcoming. When Frodsham Castle was in its glory the spring by the bridge was unheeded until one day a stranger, a Hebrew, weary and alone, refreshed himself at the fountain. Remembering how his great forefathers built wells for the benefit of those who might follow in their footsteps he piled up masonry around it, and in thankfulness and reverence laid fresh flowers beside it and blessed the spring.

> Grant that when yonder frowning walls,
> With tower and keep, are crushed and gone,
> The stones the Hebrew raised may last,
> And from his well the strengthening spring
> May still flow on.

And the tower and keep have disappeared, but, at any rate until quite recently, the Synagogue Well was reverenced and dressed with flowers on the Eve of St. Agnes in memory of its foundation.

Edward I. gave Frodsham to the treacherous David, brother of Llewellyn, Prince of Wales, and so created him an English baron. Little good it did him, for when he plotted against the king his own countrymen captured him and carried him bound to Rhuddlan and thence to Shrewsbury. He pleaded to be tried by his peers, and he was; the result being that he suffered horribly, and after he had been hung, drawn, and quartered, his grim head rotted on a spike above the Tower of London. Frodsham Manor changed hands many times, legally and otherwise.

So important a place was Frodsham in ancient days that the Eyre was held here, and when this happened there were frequently grave tumults. The time when justice should have been done seems to have been the occasion of all sorts of lawlessness; on one occasion we find arms resorted to by reason, it was said, of jury-packing; and on another, in 1422, a riot was started by sundry young sparks from Manchester. The de Traffords of Chetewood and Ancoats, and others from Manchester, with drawn swords and long bows strung, broke into close lands belonging to the natives of the town. The inhabitants of the district round, however, retaliated, driving their cattle, horses, and swine into the close lands of the Traffords. Much breaking of heads and binding over to keep the peace resulted, and all went well until the judges again visited the town.

The year that Cromwell reached the zenith of his power

witnessed the destruction of the Castle of Frodsham. Sir William Brereton and Mr. Brooke of Norton had made Rock Savage untenable for a strong Royalist, and Earl Rivers had taken up his abode on his property at Frodsham. He died on October 10, 1654, and the same night the castle was found to be in flames. Sir John's body was with difficulty rescued from the funeral pyre, and to this day it is suspected that it was no accident which occasioned the conflagration. The house was never rebuilt; the crumbling ruins were at last removed to make room for Castle Park.

CHAPTER VII

THE FOREST OF DELAMERE

The fine wide street of Frodsham is in one place cut deep into the sandstone rock and the houses stand high above the pavement, terraced along the sidewalk. Through the quaint old street I ride, climbing the hill that leads towards Helsby, where there is a steeper and finer bluff than even Overton Hill.

Skirting the hill, a fine situation for the earthworks that mark the site of the camp or fort that crowned its summit, I turn towards Alvanley. To my right is Hapsford and across the level marshes, Elton, once the home of William Frodsham, Richard II.'s Chamberlain of North Wales. Another mile further on is the riverside village of Ince.

Ince was one of the granges of the Abbey at Stanlow, the little promontory now cut off by the broad Ship Canal. In 1178 the Baron of Halton founded a convent at Stanlow for the Cistercians, building the monastic house where, unfortunately, it was exposed to fierce winds and fiercer tides. Dr. Ormerod considered that the Abbey was built here so that the holy men might mortify the flesh, away from their favourite pursuit of hunting, that the dreary scenery was intentionally chosen to put them in a better frame for prayer and fasting. Apart from the fact that the wild marshes gave them security from attack, the sportive monks would here find much to their liking, for there was fishing in plenty and wild fowl abounded.

Salmon and herring, wild goose and mallard, heron and swan must constantly have been amongst the dainties of their board, and these old monks knew well how to cook the succulent curlew, snipe and a whole host of smaller waders which they could net with ease.

They had not been settled here for more than twenty years when they began to find that their land was being taken away from them by natural causes. They sent a humble petition to the Archbishop of Canterbury stating that in "Wyrall and in their manor of Ynes they had lost by the inundations of the sea thirty carucates of land, and were daily losing more." For near a hundred years they had to bear it, sometimes their foundations being entirely flooded by the tide, until in 1289 a worse storm than usual caused one of the church towers to come down with a crash. Then a great part of the abbey was destroyed by fire (perhaps they knew how), and a second flood in the same year rose three feet in the offices of the monastery. They begged to be moved; the approach to the monastery was positively dangerous in bad weather, and their buildings were threatening to fall about their ears. At last in 1294 their prayers were granted, and the majority were moved to Whalley, four unfortunate monks being left to conduct divine service, for Stanlow was retained as a cell of Whalley Abbey until the Dissolution.

The village of Alvanley was at one time the north-west boundary of the Forest of Delamere: Maiden's Cross, which stands by the roadside near Alvanley Cliff, a fine wooded hill, is considered to be a forest mark. Less than two hundred years ago, I believe, but I am not certain of the exact date, there still survived at Alvanley a strange and barbarous custom, the origin of which carries us back to prehistoric times, in fact to the ages when our ancestors worshipped fire. Baal or Beltane fires were lighted here in spring and autumn, and the villagers in turn sprang through the blaze; little they thought that they were keeping up one of the oldest heathen customs that is

known to exist. I do not know what the fires were called in Cheshire, but in the south of England they retained the name of Baal till quite recently. In Ireland the country folk were not content with passing through the fires themselves, but must needs make their unfortunate and scared cows jump over the burning wood.

Through beautiful country, well wooded and hilly, I ride south. The road leads by Simmond's Hill, where tradition—from the look of it I should emphasise *tradition*—says that the peregrine falcon nested quite recently, across Manley Common, by Rangersbank — a grand forest name — to Mouldsworth.

Mouldsworth may now be considered the western verge of the forest, though the woods of Ashton Hayes and the rough forest country extend a little farther. Ashton Hayes, where Nicholas Ashton planted 477,000 young trees, mostly firs and larches, when the land was disafforested, evidently boasts one of the most extensive rookeries in the county; the fields all round are full of rooks, and streams of the sable birds keep passing overhead, their solemn caws mingling with the clarion notes of innumerable daws.

Peel Hall, where William of Orange stayed when on his way to the memorable battle of the Boyne, is now demolished; the modern house, with traces of the old moat, is but a step from the inn at Mouldsworth, while the old Stonehouse, repaired by one John Davies of "Mandalay" in 1674, is just across the road. Do not imagine that Davies is a Burmese name; Manley, which I have just passed, was spelt in many ways in old deeds.

Dropping down the steep hill from the inn, I turn sharply to the left before the road crosses Ashton Brook, and then commences perhaps the most enjoyable bit of road in all Cheshire. All the forest roads are charming, but from Mouldsworth to Hatch Mere is certainly one of the best that could be chosen. The thick woodlands are crowded with old forest

veterans and young saplings, Spanish chestnut, fir, larch, beech, oak, ash, in fact all the usual timber trees, with vast numbers of beautiful silver birches.

> Those faint red boles with many a line,
> Those peeling sides, the ring-dove's perch,
> Which white in darkened coppice shine,
> Are silver clusters of the birch ;
> They seem bright woodland ladies fine !

Between the trees the ground is thick with spreading bracken, and here and there, where a mossy bank peeps out amidst the waving green, great clumps of heather cluster, while elders, briers, and brambles fill in the spaces where they can. And over the road the branches often meet, making a green tunnel, and spattering the gravel roadway with dapples of light when the sun's rays struggle through the leaves. The road itself is nowhere level ; long smooth undulations carry me from mound to mound, the hillocks of a great glacial moraine.

The squirrel darts across the road, leaps lightly to the trunk of a tree, and in a second is round to the other side ; the russet jay flies screaming overhead, and disappears still screeching among the trees ; the ring-dove calls softly from the tops, the turtle purrs, and the deep notes of the stock-dove sound from the thicket. The woodlands are full of birds, forest lovers of the truest sort, and the air is musical with the hum of myriads of busy, buzzing insects.

There were three Norman forests in Cheshire, Wirral, Macclesfield, and Delamere, though the last was really double, being the forests of Mara and Mondrem. Little by little this great forest land became curtailed ; farmers cultivated the land, hamlets grew into villages, and villages to towns, while land-owners enclosed and annexed other portions. The original forest covered most of the land between the rivers Weaver and Gowy, and extended from Frodsham, then on the estuary of the Mersey, as far south as Baddiley, near Nantwich. But

a small remnant remained in 1812, when by Act of Parliament the whole was disafforested, portions being sold or allotted to certain landowners and part being reserved to the Crown as a nursery for timber. Ships were needed then to guard against the threatened Napoleonic invasion, but three years later Napoleon was *hors de combat*, and long before the young trees, mostly oak and fir, which were then planted, had grown mature enough for the navy, the wooden walls of England were obsolete. These fragments of the Royal Forest, rented by shooting tenants, but not cultivated, are the beautiful woodlands which now surround us.

Long before this time two large portions had been enclosed for the preservation of vert and venison—the Old Pale in the reign of Edward III., and the New Pale in the seventeenth century. The Forest was formerly full of deer; even the rare roebuck hid in the thickets, and the hundred was then known as Roelau, whilst in Domesday four hays for roes are mentioned at Kingsley. Leland, writing in the days of Henry VIII., says, "In the foreste I saw but little corne, because of the deere"; and Webb, speaking of the time when James I. visited Vale Royal and hunted the stag, describes the forest as containing "no small store of deer, both red and fallow, plenty of pasture in the vales, wood upon the hills, fern and heath in the plains, great store of fish and fowl in the meres, pewits and sea-maws in the flashes."

The jurisdiction of the Forest was originally vested in four families, the Kingsleys, Grosvenors, Wevers, and Mertons. The master-forestership was conferred by Earl Randal in the twelfth century on Ralph de Kingsley, to hold the same by tenure of a horn.

> This horn the grand forester wore at his side
> Whene'er his liege lord chose a hunting to ride;
> By Sir Ralph and his heirs for a century blown,
> It passed from their lips to the mouth of a Done.

The Kingsley property passed to the Dones of Utkinton by

marriage, and Richard Done usurped the entire forestership, putting in a long series of claims. Richard le Grosvenor, in 1304, disputed his rights and won the case. For two hundred years the Grosvenors of Budworth held the post, and then it was purchased by the Dones; from them it descended through the Crewes and Ardens to the present Chief Forester and Bowbearer, the Earl of Haddington. Many of the claims of Richard Done are curious; a few of them are worth mention.

He claimed the forestership in fee, and for the keeping of the office to have eight under-foresters and two garçons, who he could billet on the farms, "to witt, one day to supp, and to tarry all night, and to breake fast in the morrowe following."

To have provender for his own horse, and fern in the forest, except at hunting time.

"Pannage, windfallen trees, wood, cropes of trees cut down with axxes, crabstock, and stubb," and half the bark of all fallen oaks.

For every beast—oxen, kine, bulls, heifers, bullocks, and goats, and all strays—"a halph penny."

"All sparhawkes, marlins, and hobbys."

"All swarmes of bees."

The right shoulder of every deer; any "stroken" deer found dead, the horns, hair, and sides to be sent to Chester, the forester to have the rest.

Further, he claimed the right to have hounds, greyhounds, and dogs to take foxes, hares, cats, weasels, "and other vermyn," and to possess himself of waifs and strays, if his claim was not challenged.

The Dones, having bought the forestership, held it for many years, but it gradually decreased in value. In 1626, not many years after Webb spoke of the "great store of deer," Sir John Done wrote to the Commissioners of Forests complaining of his poor office. The wind-blown wood, but birches and a few dead oaks fit for nothing but bark, brought him only £6 odd per year, the halfpenny fine on cattle

realised about £3, the swarms of bees perhaps £5; but the sparrow-hawks, merlins, and hobbys were of no value, and the deer produced no income. In his letter he gives an estimate of his entire income, and plaintively adds, "And although that inheritance have been descended to me by many ancestors, who for the space of five hundred years have enjoyed it, yet I am not so in love with it, but that for his Majesty's service, and advance of his profit, I shall be content to leave it." In accordance with his request, considering that the deer were well nigh if not entirely annihilated, Sir John was recompensed by a grant of land, the Old Pale, where he was born, and other places.

Warburton, in his ballad of "The Old Brown Forest," says of Mara in its early days:—

> Our king the first William, Hugh Lupus our Earl,
> Then poaching I ween was no sport for a churl:
> A noose for his neck who a snare should contrive,
> Who skinned a dead buck was himself skinned alive.

Figurative perhaps, but true in the main, for the forest laws were terribly strict and cruel. In the thirteenth century, even the Abbot of Chester was charged with trespassing and killing two deer; Randle Merton, one of the foresters, took a strange revenge a few years later, for he cut the pipes which conveyed the water from Christleton to the Abbey, where they crossed his land.

If any man committed felony and fled, if the lord's venison should be discovered in his house or oven, the forester and his lord divided the culprit's goods between them; his beasts and live stock, even to his hens and geese, his linen and woollen goods, his cooking vessels, agricultural implements, his timber, turf, and even his money, were at their mercy. If caught *in flagrante delicto* the poacher got short shrift—a rope or the sword prevented further offences. In the Plea Rolls and other documents there are a few incidents which throw light on some of the tragedies—such, for instance, as a pardon

granted to Richard Done, Hugh de Frodsham, and others for killing Robert Cosyn, who refused to surrender when found slaying a deer. Desperate men were the foresters, desperate men the poachers.

The forest laws were sharp and stern,
The forest blood was keen;
They lashed together for life and death
Beneath the hollies green.

The metal good and the walnut wood
Did soon in flinders flee;
They tossed the orts to south and north
And grappled knee to knee.

The day of the deer is over, and the days of feudal laws are past, but the stain of blood is still on heather and bracken, on oak and fir—the blood of men who claimed the right to "hunt God's cattle upon God's ain hills," and of the men who, at any cost, strove to enforce the law.

In the map which was issued in 1813, when the forest lands were divided, there are many mosses and sheets of water which have now disappeared. To my right lay Blake Mere, a considerable pool, now drained, and existing only as a low, somewhat marshy portion of the forest, but Hatch Mere remains. Old forest folk still call it by its ancient name, Hatchew, and it seems to be no smaller than of yore, though on the opposite side of the road a low damp hollow, where bog asphodel and lousewort grow amongst the sundews, is all that is left of Flaxmere.

Hatch Mere is a regular forest pool, its reed-fringed borders dotted with tall spearworts, gorgeous with bright yellow flowers in the late summer, its surface covered with thick lily beds. Round the marshy margin of the pool grows in profusion the sweet-scented bog myrtle. Leaning my wheel against the hedgebank, I stride into the myrtle scrub, rubbing the fragrant leaves in my hands as I watch the grebes and listen to the cheery concert of the reed-warblers.

Turning at Hatch Mere, I ride south towards the hills, passing spots with place-names suggestive of the former condition of the Forest. Hart Hill, on my left, is surely named after the red stag; Gallowsclough Hill brings sinister recollections of old forest laws. The old Roman road ran through the Forest, and older inhabitants still have left their records in the numerous tumuli that rise, neatly shaped mounds, in many places; Castle Cob and Gleadshill Cob, in the north of the woodlands, are the names of two of these. Until it dawned upon our ancestors that sanitation was desirable in towns, the glead, or kite, was a protected bird, for it rendered signal service in the dirty street kennels by devouring the garbage, taking toll occasionally on "lesser linen." Probably large numbers of these town scavengers dwelt in the Forest, and some large nest, perhaps decorated with frills and furbelows from the housewife's clothes-line, may have been a prominent object of the landscape on this tumulus. Raven's Clough tells of another now extinct member of the avifauna; the raven and the kite, the red deer and the roe, have gone from Delamere for ever.

Directly after crossing the railway, Relick's Moss, a long, thick covert, lies on the left, while on the right the ground rises to the height of over 500 feet. A steep lane ascends to the Old Pale, where Sir John Done was allowed to settle, and where, close to the present farmstead, are the remains of the town or fortress of Eddisbury. A deep foss and earthwork rampart protect the hillside, still visible like a sunk road; Eddisbury was once a strong position. Webb says, "The Hundred of Edisbury may well prove the antiquity of itself, and of other hundreds; for that whensoever they had their division, this got its name from the place, which then was of no small account, and that was the city, town, fort, or whatsoever other great foundation, which had been built by that noble Elfleda, the Mercian Lady"; for it is said that Æthelfleda built a town here in the tenth century. Of this town Dr. Charles Leigh, writing in 1700, says there is "now nothing but Rubbish, and

at this day called the Chamber of the Forest." The Chamber, the lodge of the Dones, seems to have gone like the castle, for I can see no trace now of the house on the actual spot where it is supposed to have stood; the Old Pale farm is on the opposite side of the hill. By the side of the lane, close to Eddisbury farm, there are extensive sandstone quarries, and some of the excavations appear very ancient; doubtless the stone for the Chamber, possibly for the ramparts of Eddisbury Castle, was procured from these quarries.

Standing on the earthworks of the castle ditch, I look down upon a great expanse of the forest land stretching away to the Weaver valley, the chimneys of the salt towns — Northwich, Davenham, Winsford, and Over—marking the line of the river. In the fields, cleared forest land, between me and the woods of Oakmere Hall and Abbot's Moss, large herds of dairy cattle are grazing, sleek Cheshire shorthorns, brown, white, and roan, for the district round Delamere is practically the centre of the cheese country. These shorthorn dairy cows are as typical of Cheshire as the rough, long-horned Highlanders are of the north. Every large farm owns a considerable herd, and often the whole of the milk is made into cheese, though a very large proportion of the milk used in Manchester is despatched from stations on the Cheshire Lines Railway.

It is very pleasant to-day in these earthworks; it is not so close as in the woodlands below. A light breeze recalls to me the description of the country by William Smith, Rouge Dragon: "The ayr is very wholesome; insomuch, that the people of the countrey are seldome infected with Diseases or Sicknesse, neither do they use the help of the Physicians, nothing so much, as in other countries. For when any of them are sick, they make him a posset, and tye a kerchieff on his head; and if that will not amend him, then God be merciful to him. The people then live till they be very old; some are Grand-fathers, their Fathers yet living." Possets, however, were not the only cures resorted to in Cheshire; for "chin-cough" roast hedge-

hogs and fried mice were used. Live frogs were also held to the lips. It is recorded of one good woman that she stated that, "Her lad's cough would not go, though he'd sucked two toads to death!" There was another remedy for all evils which was considered best of all; find a dame who had married but not changed her name, and beg some bread and butter from her. If that did not cure, the rosemary might be gathered and the funeral biscuits baked.

I ride down the uneven sandstone-littered lane to the road again, and shortly pass the "Abbey Arms," the inn that guards the corner where the four roads meet close to the church of

"*The Abbey Arms.*"

Delamere, turn to my left, and leave my bicycle at a small farm by the roadside in charge of a genial old man. He is one of the old inhabitants of the district, but maybe his father still lives; at any rate, though somewhat slow on his feet, he has not arrived at the posset stage. A walk across his fields brings me to the margin of Oakmere, a strange lake that apparently has neither inlet nor outlet. Here grow in profusion the buckbean and the marsh potentil — "pit straberry" the natives call it, and not a bad name either. At one end, near the keeper's cottage, the lapwings dabble in the shallow water, and mallard drakes, whose wives nest on the bank and in the

coverts, swim in bunches under the shelter of the island-promontory, for it is cut off by marsh land. The little wood at this end is full of sundews and cotton grass, and round the margins of the pool grow many moorland plants — sundew and cranberry, the pink andromeda, and the black-berried crowberry.

Oakmere is rather smaller than it was fifty years ago; when the first Ordnance Survey was published the pool on the north side, now separated from the main mere by a tract of ling-covered land, was part of the same water. A sandy promontory projects somewhat into the lake, where there are the remains of entrenchments on the landward side, the water at one time guarding three sides from attack.

Down a little lane that runs by the side of Abbot's Moss, a good training ground, two stones were marked on the old ordnance, Headless Cross and the Long Stone. In the different versions of Nixon's Prophecy there is always some allusion to Headless Cross, but none to the Long Stone.

> A crow shall sit on the top of Headless Cross,
> In the forest so grey,
> And drink of the nobles' gentle blood so free.

The general notion seems to be that Nixon foretold that a crow or raven would be able to drink of the blood which flowed past the stone while sitting on the top of the cross, for great battles were to be fought in the neighbourhood. It is further asserted, by those wishing to prove the truth of the wise man's saws, that the cross at that time stood many feet above the ground, but that it had since sunk so low that it is in the position predicted. Wishing to see for myself how the stone and other matters stand, I ride down this sandy little lane, keeping a sharp look-out for the cross. At "Cabbage Hall," a roadside inn bearing the strange title on its front, I make inquiries, but though the people have heard of the cross they do not know where it stands or stood. One

girl, however, says she knows it, and directs me to the Long Stone, which stands by the side of the lane opposite a white cottage. The Long Stone is a short upright stone fixed in a cross-shaped socket which is flush with the ground: the girl at the white cottage says, "It is nobbut a mark." This young lady, I suspect, is correct in her surmise; the Long Stone is probably a mere-mark, one of the limits of the old Forest of Mara. This low upright stone, which I suspect has never been any higher, is what the interpreters of Nixon have seen, and have concluded that it is a cross which has sunk in the soft ground. Riding back, I find what I believe to be the true Headless Cross; lying as if thrown in the ditch is a fair-sized square stone, similar to the socket stones of all the Cheshire crosses, for there is a hole in it for an upright. The position of this stone and its shape and size are very similar to the stone at Maiden's Cross, and an archæologist of some standing has assured me that these two crosses mark the north-western and south-eastern boundaries of the forest. To theorise on slight data is dangerous, but I think it quite possible that the Long Stone is a later mere-mark than the Cross, having been placed where it stands, a short distance beyond the Cross, to include within the forest bounds the whole of Abbot's Moss and Newchurch Common; or the Cross may be the mark for the Forest, and the Stone for the bounds of the lands belonging to the Abbot of Vale Royal.

The marshy ground that surrounds Oakmere and the open Newchurch Common and Abbot's Moss show what Delamere Forest was like before it was planted with woodland timber, but a better example of the common land is not far off. South again from Oakmere lies Little Budworth Common, a great heathy tract which I enter by turning off the Tarporley road where a sign directs to Oulton Park. A long gravel drive runs first between trees and then out across the Common—a delightful road to ride along. Heather and ling, with small fir plantations and clumps of trees, and dotted with graceful

birch trees, stretches on either side. Here and there are deep black-looking pools or marshy spots, where the water lies thickly grown with rushes; the Common is one of the last of the Cheshire mosses.

Nearing Oulton Park the woods are thicker; small firs and larches, where I hear the goldcrest faintly singing, give place to noble beeches which surround the gateway; the Park is well timbered within and without. Passing the gates I make for Little Budworth, a charming village with an old church, an old mill pool, and an old sundial, all worth looking at. Just outside the village, somewhat removed from the road, is a cosy little inn, the "Egerton Arms," a hostelry well known to the Cheshire Hunt, but often missed by cyclists. Here, ordering a meal which from long experience will I know be first-rate, I leave my machine and walk past the tall beeches along the park wall to a stile. There is a private footpath, but no restriction is made so long as visitors will keep their dogs from chasing the deer, and will behave themselves in a decorous manner.

The Hall of Oulton, a large building, added to and considerably altered at the beginning of the nineteenth century, is the seat of Sir Philip Egerton. The Egertons of Egerton possessed land here in the reign of Richard III., and on the death of Hugh Done, son of Sir John Done of Utkinton, in the days of Henry VII., they became lords of the whole estate. A Tudor mansion, built by a Sir Philip Egerton, was burnt in the eighteenth century, and little was saved except some valuable Japanese wainscotting, which was hurriedly stripped from the walls and thrown into the moat; it now adorns a room in the present hall.

Nixon foretold trouble for a lord of Oulton; he was to be hung at his own door. This prophecy was fulfilled, said the credulous followers of superstition, by a fatal accident that befell one of the Egertons when he was thrown by his horse at the gates of the Park. Like many of the Cheshire families,

the Egertons were great fighters; Sir John, along with some of his relations, fell on that fatal day at Blore Heath, while in 1544 Sir Philip was knighted for valour at the siege of Leith.

Charles I., when hard up, wrote a begging letter by his own hand to Sir Rowland Egerton. It begins: "Trusty and welbeloved wee greete you well," and then goes on to ask for a mere trifle of £2000 "for our necessary support, and the maintenance of our army, which wee are compelled to rayse for the defense of our peson, the Protestant religion, and the laws of the land." The King gave his own personal promise to repay with interest, but perhaps he never had the opportunity. Sir Rowland's son, captain of yeomen, and afterwards lieutenant-colonel, was knighted soon after the Restoration.

Besides the fine beech trees, which are nearly two hundred years old, there are some noble chestnuts in the Park; beneath these trees the fallow deer, of which there are a number, some of them almost white, thoroughly enjoy themselves when the nuts drop, for deer like nothing better than ripe chestnuts. The Pool at Oulton, well stocked with fish, is the source of supply for the Northwich Water Company; on a tree-covered island there was at one time a heronry, but as at so many other places in the county, no birds build here now.

Having refreshed at the "Egerton Arms," I repass the gates of Oulton, and rounding Cote Millpool, reach the hamlet of Cote Brook. On making some inquiries from a native of the place, I learn that the name is only of recent origin, the place being called Utkinton-cum-Rushton, but owing to sheep being folded there in some numbers it gradually gained the name of Cote. The name Cote Brook is given to the old portion of the village on the first ordnance map, but Cote Mill is there called Oulton Mill, and was the spot where the club-footed miller was supposed to be Nixon's predicted miller with two heels on one foot; it is also stated that another malformed individual, according to the prophecy, was born at Budworth,

a lad with three thumbs. Many country children are apparently gifted with ten thumbs and no fingers.

The road now commences to climb, for I leave the main highway which would lead me back by the Seven Lows to Delamere, and take a steep hill lane. The Seven Lows, spoken of by Leland as the "work of men of warre," are supposed to be tumuli, and though I hear that some of them have been opened and a quantity of black, apparently burnt, sand found, I cannot see much difference between these irregular hillocks and the ordinary glacial mounds of the moraine. Pushing my machine up this stony lane, I meet an ancient inhabitant, very aged and much crippled with rheumatism, but withal cheerful and communicative. I ask him about Nixon and the Headless Cross. He had "yeerd o' Nixon," but not of the Cross. "Ask some of th' ould uns, it's a bit out o' my country." Then a happy thought strikes him, and he grins with his toothless gums. "'Theer's th' 'Edless Woman down at Duddon." That was his own country; he knew the publics there.

I question the old man further, and he stops a passing farmer, an elderly man whom he calls a "young feller." The farmer can give no more information, but suggests that it may be another name for the remains at Eddisbury.

"Oh, Yedsbury," says my old friend, "if it's by another name, so be it." And with that I leave him, gleefully chewing some of my hot smoking tobacco, and cross a field to the top of High Billinge.

"Yo mun leave yer name on trees, theer's lots theer," the old man calls as I cross the grass. He is right. Like so many other places, High Billinge is the repository for the names of hundreds of fools who are never satisfied if they do not leave their own insignificant, stupid titles to spoil the beauties of nature and the richness of antiquities. In the visitors' book of an inn in the Lake District there are some smart verses written by an Oxford undergraduate. After deal-

ing with these carvers of names and desecrators of beauty as they deserve, he concludes :—

> Nay, every gate in Heaven's land,
> It is my firm conviction,
> Will bear in well-known sprawling hand
> Tom Noddy's superscription.
> And those who fare to warmer zones
> (Scarce subject fit for jokers)
> Will find the classic name of Jones
> Cut deeply in the pokers.

High Billinge, the highest point of the Delamere hills, is the clump of trees so conspicuous from all the country round. The trees cluster round the summit, and grow on what appears to me to be an undoubted tumulus. Surely so carefully rounded a mound as this is not natural. No tumulus is marked on the ordnance map, nor have I seen one mentioned in any book ; but from its regular circular shape and its position it is far more like one than any of the Seven Lows. There is no view from the actual summit of High Billinge ; the trees prevent it ; but from below the clump on any side the prospect is fine.

Keeping to the upland lanes, I make for Harrow Hill, a thickly wooded portion of the Forest, and close to Manorchy Hall (pronounced Minnorkey by the natives) I stop to rest at Tirley Farm. Tirley is a row of old cottages converted into one farm. Close to it in the wood is Whistlebitch Well. Getting directions from the genial farmer and his hospitable wife, I stroll down a pretty lane to the well-head.

There is in the British Museum a rare pamphlet which was issued in 1600, describing "Newes out of Cheshire of the New found Well." So far as I can make out from the description this is Whistlebitch Well. "There are about the middest of the forrest certaine ruinous walles of stone, some inclosures, and the prints of an auncient situation, which as well common report of the countrie, as also the testimonies of the best

writers of England's antiquities, doe affirme to haue been a citie." "The borrough or towne being utterly decaied and gone, there remaineth only upon the top of the utmost height within that situation, a proper built lodge, called the Chamber. About a mile and halfe from the Chamber toward the south-west side of the forrest is situate the New found Well."

I am aware that the Lysons, in *Magna Britannia*, on the authority of a vicar of Little Budworth, state that this well was at the Hollins, and that "fourscore years" before the tenant of the estate, having built a house, destroyed the "bath," and conveyed the water through lead pipes into his kitchen. The Hollins, however, is nearly two and a half miles from the Chamber, and the stream that flows from the house flows first due east, joining the same stream that enters Oulton Millpool. whereas the water from the New-found Well is said to flow north for some distance and then turn south to the pool. Then, again, the Hollins would hardly be considered to be on the south-west side of the Forest; it is in fact rather to the east of Eddisbury, though Whistlebitch Well is almost on the south-west border. Probably the vicar of Little Budworth, not knowing exactly where the well was situated, was speaking from hearsay evidence. He would not be likely to have personal knowledge of what took place eighty years before. Two hundred years—for the Lysons wrote in 1810—is quite long enough for an error in locality to become an accepted fact.

The healing powers of this well were reported to be wonderful. Any disease was cured by drinking the water; and it was even affirmed that sight was restored to the blind. It is said that so many as two thousand people daily resorted to this spot to be cured of all manner of evils, and the foresters naturally had their work cut out to prevent the deer from being disturbed. The chief forester, one of the Dones, would not allow any of his men to take fees from the sick, considering that this marvellous cure should be free to all, but posted his men so as to prevent damage to the adjoining property.

In amongst the bracken, almost lost in thick foliage, the water trickles down through the wood. Some quarrymen have hacked out the sandstone in one spot just below a forest road, and this, by many people, is thought to be the well. The farmer, however, tells me—and I agree when I see the spot—that it was the well-head, now trampled by the cattle, which was once so famous. Perhaps the water has lost its virtue, for Whistlebitch Well is now forsaken and forgotten. I cannot perceive anything special in its taste. The pamphlet says: "There be many that at their first taste of the water, doe confidently affirme they feele as it were some relish or smacke of an allome-like composition; and not a fewe I haue heard censure, that there seemes to them a little resemblance of the taste of licoris." Neither alum nor "licoris" is perceptible to me. Faith healing, I fancy, was powerful three hundred years ago, for people flocked here from all the neighbouring counties and from Wales.

Seated on the wall of Tirley farm, eating the finest Cheshire cheese and drinking new milk, I listen with interest to the stories of my worthy host. There is a right of way to the well, he says. Once he nearly got into serious trouble by blocking up the pathway with hedge-cuttings to stop the cattle from straying. One man in the neighbourhood still boasts that he annually fetches a bottle of the water to preserve his right of crossing his neighbour's land. I expect that annual bottle is regarded in the light of a fetich. From this wall, on the edge of Harrow Hill, there is a view of Beeston Castle and the western slopes of the Peckforton Hills, and away in the distance, backed by the hills of Wales, are the spires and towers of Chester. My host knows every hill by name, and every village, and points each out in turn. Talking of birds, I find he knows the nightjar by a name used on the neighbouring Peckforton Hills, but not so far as I know elsewhere. Lychfowl is the name given to it; a sinister term meaning corpse—the same word, in fact, as lichgate. The

superstitious rustics, hearing the uncanny churr at night, have associated the much-maligned and innocent bird with death and evil spirits.

Along the shoulder of the hill I ride to Kelsbarrow, passing on my way King's Gate, one of the old entrances to the Forest. There is little trace left of the British fortress at Kelsbarrow, but the situation is superb. In places the slope of the hillside is almost precipitous, and from side to side stretched a deep ditch and a rampart fourteen yards in thickness. Most of the ditch and rampart has been levelled, but here and there it still remains. The Britons knew how to choose the best spots for their camps.

The descent I make from Kelsbarrow to Kelsall is not to be recommended for cyclists; besides, I am not at all sure if it is a public way. There is a road by Castlehill, and a better one still leads to the highroad. In any case, the descent into Kelsall requires care; it is steep. From the highest part of the high road, with good brakes ready, one may coast almost to Tarvin. I do not stop at Kelsall, but sail through the village, passing numbers of men and women in Salvation Army uniform, for there is a large barracks here, and do not need to work for another mile.

Tarvin Church is one of these fine old buildings for which Cheshire is so deservedly famous. It is built of local sandstone, grey and weathered like the rugged bluff of Kelsbarrow Castle, and though it has been renewed in places, has much ancient work both inside and out.

In the interior some of the work is interesting, but much of it is far more modern than the exterior; there is a good squint, and some ancient monuments in the Bruen Chapel, a finely-carved altar-piece and an old carved chair. Across one of the beams of the oak roof is the following inscription:— "This Rovfe was made An no Domini 1650 Raphe Wright John Bruen Church Wardins Charls Boovth Will Venabls Carpintrs."

Tarvin.

The Georgian screen, with traces of older work, is worthy of notice, as is also the plain but good oak panelling in the choir vestry, where, however, the exceedingly plain church chest, dated 1805, is a sample of the ugly work of the "Churchwarden period." John Bruen, churchwarden when the roof was made, would be probably son or grandson of old John Bruen of Bruen Stapleford, a most worthy and hospitable

Holme Street Hall.

man of the fine old school. It was this John Bruen who, in his mistaken zeal, destroyed all the stained glass in the church windows, for there were "many superstitious images in the windows, which, by their painted coats, darkened the lights of the church, and obscured the brightness of the Gospel," so "he caused all those painted puppets to be pulled down in a peaceable manner, and, at his own cost, glazed the windows again."

Round the walls and on the tower are many marvellous specimens of monkish art, gargoyles and mural carvings. These figures and animals remind me of the strange creatures Sir John Mandeville met with on his travels. Perhaps his descriptions served as models. In an angle of the window mouldings, carefully hidden, hardly showing against the grey stone, a spotted flycatcher is nesting—the living animal amongst the unreal representation of strange beasts.

By the church stands the tiny grammar school, and on the church wall is a tablet in memory of John Thomasen, "for thirty-six years master of the grammar school, in that capacity approved and eminent." Thomasen, who died in 1740, was a great hand at writing, and "specimens of his ingenuity are treasured up, not only in the cabinets of the curious, but in the public libraries throughout the kingdom." He even transcribed for Queen Anne "the Icon Basilike of her royal grandfather."

Carvings at Tarvin.

From Tarvin I pass on to Holme Street Hall, a beautiful Elizabethan house that stands by the side of the highroad, next to a modern house which bears the name of Holme Street Abbey. It is of brick, with fine gables and bay windows—a grand specimen of the solid but picturesque architecture of the sixteenth century. Holme Street was sometime the property of the Savages, and from them it was bought by the Starkies.

Great Barrow Church, a little to the right, has been much renovated, and the tower is eighteenth-century work, decorated at the corners with big vases. There is a date on the church, 1671, which marks the time when the chancel was renewed by Henry Bridgman, its rector, afterwards Dean of Chester and Bishop of Sodor and Man.

CHAPTER VIII

CHESTER

The country north of the road has historical interest; so instead of riding straight into Chester, I pass through Guilden Sutton to Mickle Trafford, and enter Chester by the Frodsham road. It is all cultivated fields and outlying residential country for Chester now, but the low flat land which stretches northward towards the Mersey, the level Gowy valley, was once unclaimed marsh and heath. We can only form an idea of what this country was like by considering such localities as Little Budworth Common or the wild moorlands of the eastern highlands on the Derbyshire border.

Where the unfenced roads crossed the moorlands it was the custom to set up the gibbet on a little eminence as a warning to passers-by of lax morals. In 1790 the body of James Price, hanged for robbing the Warrington mail, creaked in its iron casings as it swung in the wind by the side of this very road. For thirty years the chains held together the mouldering fragments of his humanity, frightening no doubt the bird-nesting boy, but not the birds themselves. When, in 1820, the pole was taken down, the nest of a robin was discovered within the hollow skull.

> Oh ! James Price deserved his fate :
> Naught but robbing in his pate
> Whilst alive, and now he's dead
> Has still Robin in his head.

High he swings for robbing the mail,
But his brain of Robin female
Still is quite full; though out of breath,
The passion e'en survives his death.

Hoole Heath, like Rudheath, was a sanctuary for criminals; not only that, but it was specially set apart for foreigners, for here they might squat for a year and a day. Twice was this then open moorland the scene of fierce battles; first in the end of the ninth century, when Malcolm King of Scots brought his forces against Chester, and secondly when King Charles's army was defeated at Rowton Heath. Langdale retired his cavalry from Rowton to Hoole, followed closely by Poyntz and Jones. Gerard, by a sortie from the city, altered the condition of affairs for a time, checking the advance of the Roundheads, but just when reinforcements were appearing the Royalist horse, as was so often the case, got into confusion and actually routed itself, and the King, standing, it is said, on Phœnix Tower, saw his scattered forces flying pell-mell for Holt Bridge.

A little more than a mile from Hoole I enter Chester—Chester, the ancient city, capital of Cheshire and practically of North Wales; Chester, deservedly beloved by Americans; Chester, the centre of all historical interest of the County Palatine. The men of Chester are proud of their ancient home; they love its quaint street rows, and lath and plaster buildings, its fine cathedral, its ruined church, its Roman baths and houses. Chester to-day, save that the streets are wider and lined with tram lines, and that the bright electric light illuminates the dark corners, looks much as it did in mediæval days. No one dare nowadays erect a plain brick building; no one would think of putting up an ugly factory within the city; the modern buildings are all half-timbered, black and white, and often it is not easy at first sight to distinguish between a new shop or house and the freshly painted timbers and clean new whitewash of some time-

honoured mansion. The Rows, the raised sidewalks with shops within and shops below, for which Chester is so famous, are rebuilt and repatched whenever the decay of time threatens their stability; the city walls that now but gird the centre of the town are kept in perfect order. How few towns can boast that they are still encircled by their original walls.

There are many excellent hotels in Chester; why should I say which are the best? Let the visitor look at a few and judge from their appearance how they will suit his pocket; he will be comfortable in any case. There are four principal streets, three of them named after the gates, Northgate, Eastgate, Watergate, and the fourth is Bridge Street. These gates were guarded by strong keeps or towers, battered repeatedly by invaders, Dane, Northumbrian, Welsh, and English; battered oft out of all shape and semblance of their former selves. Yet, though the walls and gates fell, though red-haired Welshmen or Irish kerns swarmed through the breaches, they were rebuilt over and over again, and to-day, though the dread ravages of time rot the old stones, and modern improvements cause constant alterations, the loyal citizens of Chester ever repair them, and the circuit of the walls may still be made.

Chester is not confined within its walls; how could a growing, modern town be so restricted? Without the city walls the city itself spreads on every side; the walled enclosure is now but a nucleus. In company with my friend, Mr. Robert Newstead, the versatile and obliging curator of the Grosvenor Museum, I make a tour of the city, leaving my steed to get a well-earned rest. A better guide I could not wish for.

Before starting round the walls we dive into the cellar of Dickson's seed warehouse in John Street. The name of Dickson, Chester, is well known throughout the length and breadth of the land by horticulturists and gardeners, but who would think of visiting the rooms of a seedsman to view the

walls of Chester? Down in the concrete cellar, where sacks of the germs of the future blossoms of England's gardens lie piled in hundreds, stands, thanks to Mr. Dickson's wisdom, a splendid piece of the original Roman wall. It is built of squared sandstone blocks bound together by mortar, and in places filled in with pebbles, forming a rubble or conglomerate; the sloping plinth, unbroken, shows what the lower part of the wall was like, and a yard or two away, behind the warehouse, rises the present mediæval boundary of the city proper.

This more modern wall was in places built upon the Roman foundations, but as a rule it was erected a little back from the older work; sometimes all traces of Roman work are lost, for the town or camp of that period was probably smaller than the later city. It is supposed that the ancient wall ran by Pepper Street, a Roman name.

There was once a postern called the Pepper Gate, but it was built up by a mayor of Chester, and thus arose the local version of shutting the stable door when the horse is stolen; in Cheshire folk say the mayor shut Pepper Gate when his daughter was gone. This daughter, so the story goes, was playing at ball in Pepper Street with other damsels when her gallant, like bold Lochinvar, "rode out of the West," snapped her up to his saddle and spurred out of the postern. After this abduction, in which, if Fuller is to be believed, the damsel was not an unwilling party, the Mayor closed the door in disgust; "though I see not why," says the old worthy, "the city should suffer in the conveniences for the mayor's want of care, or his daughter's lack of obedience. But what shall we say? Love will make the whole wall a gate, to procure its own escape."

Close to Dickson's warehouse, without the city walls, is the ancient church of St. John's; the ruined arches and crumbled walls, most picturesque, stand outside the present building, while at the west end is the massive base of the old tower, which just over twenty years ago was standing. In 1881

I saw this tower. Webb says that St. John's had "a fair broad steeple; which steeple in the year 1574, did half of it fall down from the very top to the bottom; but it is building up again." Within a year or two of this date there is recorded the fall of the same or another tower, probably a smaller one. In 1881 I remember visiting Chester and seeing the rebuilt tower, which had again, within a day or two before, fallen "from the very top to the bottom" on one side. It was never rebuilt, and now the huge base only remains, with some insecure timbers still bridging the open top. Giraldus tells us that St. John's was built in the year 689 by King Æthelred, who was shown where to erect it by a wonderful white hind which, having by its presence indicated the spot, vanished away; but other authorities date the original church three centuries later, saying it was built by Earl Æthelred, a Saxon ruler of Mercia.

In the church, on a Norman pillar of the north aisle, there is a fragment of a fresco of reputed Saxon workmanship; it either represents St. John, or, as has been suggested, the founder of the church; the former idea is most likely. Near the river, at the lower side of the churchyard, stands a hermitage, now "to let," as a notice board announces, which has been used as a cell or quiet residence by some retiring recluse. This is the place—the cell of St. James, near St. John's Church—where, Giraldus states, Harold, last king of the Saxons, ended his days as an anchorite after losing the sight of one eye on the field of Hastings. The tradition that Harold escaped from that fatal field and died in retirement is wide-spread but unproven; we may please ourselves whether we accept the pathetic story of the finding of Harold's mangled body by the faithful Edith of the Swan-neck, or the escape and retirement of the Earl in this or some other secret hiding-place.

We mount the walls at the Eastgate, which bridges the most important street and stands nearly in the centre of the

present city; in Pennant's day—the close of the eighteenth century—the Roman gate still stood, whence the sentinel of the twentieth legion looked out across the great Cheshire plain. Electric trams now pass through the gateway, which somewhat constricts the well-paved road; but in 1636 there was, close to this gate, a cesspool or lodgment of water, the "unwholesomeness" of which was a cause of complaint, and the inhabitants were warned that if, within a month, they did not cleanse the streets before their doors, they would be fined 10s. At the same time, we read: "The maior caused the dirt of many foule lanes in Chester to be carried to make a banke to enlarge the roodey, and let shipps in." The days of scavenging kites and crows were over; sanitation had begun.

Following the walls northward we pass the cathedral, the fine pile that replaced St. Werburgh's famous abbey. Chester was monastic through and through; beside the Benedictine monastery there was a priory for nuns of the same order, and the Black, Grey, and White Friars had houses in the city. Henry Bradshaw, or Harry Braddeshaa, monk of the abbey, has written for us the life of St. Werburgh, patron saint of Chester, "that holy virgin, who died in Chester," "who cared for no worldly honours, but gave herself to godly and holy contemplations." A monastery of secular canons was founded here in the reign of Athelstane, but in 1093 Hugh Lupus, to all practical purposes the first Norman Earl of Chester, for Gerbod, his predecessor, seems to have done nothing with the earldom, gave the monastery to the Benedictines, to pray for the soul of William the king, of William his father, his mother Queen Maud, all the royal family, himself, the founder, and Ermintrude his wife, and all his household, ancestors, heirs, both living and dead, and those to follow after, and all good Christians everywhere. And the great earl, who ruled the broad lands of Cheshire by right of the sword, as his patron and king ruled by the crown, if all the stories about him are true, needed the prayers most sadly. What says Odericus?

"He was not abundantly liberal, but profusely prodigal, and carried not so much a family as an army still with him; he took no account either of his receipts or disbursements; he daily wasted his estates and delighted more in falconers and huntsmen than in the tillers of his land, or Heaven's orators, the ministers: he was given much to his belly, whereby in time he grew so fat that he could scarce crawle." Hugh the Fat the Welsh called him; they hated him well, and not

The Cloisters.

without cause, for he scrupled not to torture them most horribly whenever he caught them opposing his power. The rule of the sword was no idle phrase.

"This pious profligate," as Croston dubs him, is buried within the abbey, where in the cloisters that remain the crest of the Wolf's Head may still be seen on the bosses of the groins. Richard, his son, who succeeded him, was drowned in the ill-fated "White Ship," along with the two sons of Henry I.

There were earls of Chester, too, long before the days of Hugh Lupus; Geoffrey of Monmouth asserts that one, Cursale or Sursalem, was a knight of the immortal Round Table.

Long before the Romans came Chester was a British stronghold. Old Dr. Leigh, quoting the tradition of Sir Thomas Elyot, says the earliest name of the place was Neomagus, "so call'd from Magus, son of Samothes, son of Japhet, its Founder, about 240 years after the Flood." Henry Bradshaw, Fuller's "diligent historian," says that the founder of the city was Leon Gower, "a mighty strong giant,"

> Which builded caves and dungeons many a one,
> No goodly building, ne proper, ne pleasant;

but that King Leir or Leil erected pleasant buildings, and so gave rise to the name Caer-leon. Camden perhaps was the first to point out that Caerlleon was but the British name for the camp of the victorious twentieth legion, the Lleon Vawr.

The walls, reported to be built by Marius, the British king, in A.D. 73, were repaired by "that noble Mercian lady"—the Saxon Amazon—Æthelfleda, in 908. Whatever may have been done by Roman-taught Britons or by later Saxons, the few bits of original wall which remain bear the unmistakable stamp of Roman military architecture; Chester walls—walls, not earthworks—were originally Roman.

The Phœnix Tower, on the walls, is called a museum; the man in charge, while I look round the miscellaneous collection of all sorts of more or less useless articles, recites a long story about a king of England named Charles who stood here and watched his army defeated on Rowton Heath, pointing to a tall chimney, and who was wickedly slain by rebels. He shows me his portrait—a cheap print—and pictures of his last moments, and finishes by saying that all the stuffed birds—badly stuffed too—the snakes' skins and sharks' teeth, the bits of doubtful Roman pottery and horn cores of *Bos longifrons*, the pottery and savage weapons were collected by himself.

Hardly listening to his rigmarole, I recall the story of a Chester guide who, pointing to the Shropshire Union Canal which flows by the walls, told his hearers that King Charles was drowned in this self-same waterway.

The Shropshire Canal passes through a deep cutting in the rock, and during its construction the Roman fosse, wide and deep, was discovered, while many antiquities of that date were unearthed in the excavation. All along, from Eastgate to the Tower and on either side of Northgate, we see traces of the original wall, the same square blocks and sloping plinth that show in Dickson's well-preserved piece of masonry. The Northgate is altered now; it was at one time the city prison, and captives were led to execution across the little bridge that still remains, so I am informed. Pemberton's Parlour, a little farther on, was one of the many batteries; it has been rebuilt even more recently than 1708, the date which is given on the tablet.

At the extreme angle of the walls the London and North-Western Railway carved through the ancient boundaries, but the city authorities have caused the breach to be rebuilt; here at the corner stands the Water Tower, dating from 1332, a strong fortress, for the waters of the then important river washed its walls. It is now used as a museum, and in the grounds there stand the pillars of the heating apparatus of a Roman bath or drying room, which were discovered in Bridge Street within the city. In taking leave of Chester, Thomas Fuller says: "And now being to take my leave of the ancient and honorable city, the worst that I wish it is, that the distance betwixt Dee and the New Tower may be made up; all obstacles being removed which cause or occasion the same. That the rings on the New Tower (now only for sight) may be restored to the service for which they were first intended, to fasten vessels thereto. That the vessels in the river (lately degenerated from ships to barques) may grow up again to their former strength and stature."

The Infirmary, a fine building on the left, bears the date 1761, and next to it is the Queen's School, a far more sightly building than the old City Gaol which, until 1879, stood on this spot. Beyond the Watergate, the exit to the vanished quays, stands Chester Castle, now the militia barracks. James Neild, a Knutsford man, visited many prisons in the Kingdom and abroad at the end of the eighteenth century. He reported favourably on the gaols of Chester, although he found in the Castle a man who, having attempted to escape, wore, "in addition to the heavy double irons on his legs, a strong iron belt round his waist, and a long collar round his neck, with a prong that went down his back." These little extras the man had worn for two months, the gaoler said, though the man himself asserted three. Neild also found "the only iron gloves I ever saw" in the Castle; they were no relics of a past barbarous age, but a pair the gaoler had caused to be manufactured in Chester, for he had seen like articles used with effect upon the negroes of the Leeward Islands. This was Chester Castle at the beginning of the last century, and it compared favourably with prisons in other parts of England!

Prisoners who wished to save their property for their heirs often refused to plead, and various devices were used to break their obstinacy. Adam of the Woodhouses, having burnt the said houses and carried away his goods, was one of the stubborn men; they gave him three morsels of bread one day, and three sups from the nearest puddle the next; but Adam lingered long on this sumptuous diet, so Edward II., then king, in order to accelerate the man's decision, originated the idea of putting heavy weights upon the chest. Thus at Chester was instituted that barbarous punishment, if punishment it can be called, of pressing to death. Compare with this, and the eighteenth and nineteenth century severity noticed by Neild, the fact that, in the reign of Edward III., the deputy constable was hauled over the coals for loading a prisoner with so many irons, putting him

in the stocks and otherwise maltreating him, as to cause his death.

When in 1867 England was seriously alarmed by the Fenian scare, news leaked out through an informer that Chester Castle was to be attacked, arms and ammunition seized, the telegraph wires cut, and all the railways into the city, save only the Welsh line, to be destroyed. The Irish intended to seize a train or trains, hurry to Holyhead, capture the mail-boat, and cross in triumph to the Emerald Isle.

On the fixed day every train from Birkenhead or Crewe brought down its load of Irish workmen, till between fourteen and fifteen hundred were collected, forming into martial array without the city. But a train had brought a regiment of infantry from Manchester, the Castle garrison were on the alert, and Chester was full of special constables. Quietly as they had gathered, the scared rebel army melted away, and England was saved from what might have been a most serious outrage.

Beneath the walls, where once the noble river flowed, bringing trading vessels from all parts, stretches the Chester Racecourse or Roodee, which even in Webb's day was "a fine spacious piece of ground of great pleasure and delight, used for a cow pasture in the summer time; and all the year for a wholesome and pleasant walk by the side of the Dee, and for recreations of shooting, bouling, and such other exercises as are performed at certain times by men; and by running horses in presence and view of the mayor of the city, and his brethren; with such other lords, knights, ladies, gentlemen, as please, at these times, to accompany them for that view." Chester races are still held here, though sheep now crop the sward better than cows.

The origin of the name is still uncertain; some say the stump of the cross which still stands was the Rood, and that the field was the Rood Eye; but the legend is a singular one, though, as Ormerod and others point out, rather mythical.

Lady Trawst, wife of the governor of Hawarden in the tenth century, was praying for rain to an image of the Virgin that stood on the church of the Holy Rood at that place—Ormerod says there was no church there in the tenth century; her prayers were answered, for a heavy thunderstorm broke with a crash of thunder that loosened the image from its place. It fell, and in falling slew the suppliant. The image was tried by jury and condemned to be hanged, but how could they hang an image? burning would be sacrilege; so the only alternative was drowning. Bound to the Cross or Rood, the image of the Virgin was carried to the Dee and left on the bank, but the rising tide carried it to Chester and deposited it below the walls. Here, the story goes, it was buried, but Archbishop Rogers tells that it was conveyed to St. John's, where it was set up and remained as an object of pious awe and veneration. This part of the story seems true, for it appears there was a figure of the Virgin at St. John's, which, at the Reformation, was thrown down and afterwards was converted into a whipping-block for refractory scholars by the master of the Grammar School, being in the end burnt by either some ardent Protestants or some one short of firewood.

There is a break in the walls where the fine road that leads to Wales leaves the city, though the road is really levelled up to the walls; a few yards farther along this road the magnificent single span of the Grosvenor Bridge, opened by our late Queen—then Princess Victoria—in 1832, crosses the river.

The tide is running up; the fishing-boats, stranded on the mud of the Handbridge side, the suburb opposite Chester, are gradually righting themselves; the water laps the buttresses of the old Chester Bridge and flows up the sluice of the Dee Mills, the buildings which stand where Hugh Lupus once ground all the Chester corn.

Edward Pugh, writing in 1816, after speaking of the bore that he saw rushing up the Dee, describes a "fleet of market boats, that had been fairly outrun by the tide, bringing with

them the luxuries of the table, in exchange for the one thing so universally needed, cash." Market boats, like the oversea shipping, have deserted Chester for ever, though there is considerable trade in light draughts with the works on the side of the river below the city.

There was a bridge at Chester before 1227, but it was often washed away, broken, and rebuilt, till in 1387 a more permanent structure seems to have been erected. In the Parliamentary troubles, and later in the '45 rising, breaches were made in this bridge to render it useless for the time, but looking at it from below one can form a good idea of what the old Handbridge was like. The ancient cutwaters and

The Dee Bridge.

buttresses on the seaward side still remain, but when the bridge was widened it was entirely rebuilt on the inland side. Just above it is the tidal weir, where two swans are swimming placidly close to the moored buoy marked "Dangerous." "If thou had'st the rent of Dee Mills thou would'st spend it," is an old Cheshire warning, for these mills were indeed valuable properties. So too was the salmon fishery, so it is still, for the great fish has not forsaken the Dee as it has the polluted Mersey. "Salmon and sermons have both their season in Lent," and in more than Lent the Handbridge fishermen know well; and the Welshmen up at Bangor-Iscoed still catch the fish from their quaint old-time coracles as they did when the Earl guarded the fishing rights with zealous care. So

plentiful were salmon in Plantagenet days that restrictions were made to stop people from feeding their apprentices on nothing but salmon; though but little later, at a feast at Vale Royal, we find six shillings was the price paid for a salmon, two shillings more than the value of a buck. Perhaps carriage was expensive.

Oxford men and Londoners are justly proud of their Isis and Thames, and there are other good boating rivers, to wit, the Avon, Severn, Trent, and Wye, but for an all-round boating stream give me the Dee. It is broad and straight, but not too straight to be beautiful or too broad for rowing; it flows full and deep, neither too rapid nor too slow. There are no deep valleys or narrow wooded gorges in its lower reaches, like the woods above Maidenhead, or Symonds Yat on the Wye, but there is verdant foliage at Eaton, and shady graceful willows line the banks and sweet meadow-lands kiss the water's edge. Those who for the first time gaze upon the landing-stage on Saturday or Sunday in the season are amazed at the crowd of pleasure-seekers embarking in gigs, whiffs, skiffs, inrigged, half-rigged, and outrigged boats, canoes, and pleasure steamers. Where do they all come from, these flannelled men and gaily dressed women? Surely not all from sleepy Chester! They are many of them Chester folk, for Chester is a boating town; but train after train, some of them specials composed of nothing but saloons, have brought their holiday-makers from Manchester, Liverpool, and Birkenhead. All the various boat-owners on the river have their work cut out at holiday time to find crafts enough for the stream of people who desire to spend their leisure upon the river. Is it necessary to recall that first recorded pleasure trip on the Dee, when King Edgar, a thousand years ago, took the helm of his state barge, and eight subservient kings toiled at the oars? Was it a royal frolic or an act of homage?

Through the Bridgegate we turn up Bridge Street, where on the left is the "Bear and Billet," a gabled black and white

inn, once the town house of the Earls of Shrewsbury and where for long a set of rooms were reserved for the Talbots. On the same side is the "King's Head," a fine Elizabethan house where resided those antiquarians and historians, the Randle Holmes. The interior, fallen much to decay, was carefully restored some years ago, and now is full of interesting relics of ancient domestic ornamentation and furniture; and the exterior is not the original, which fell down long ago.

On the right the Rows begin, those covered pathways where, says Smith, "a man may go dry from one place of the city to another, and never come in the street, but go as it were in galleries, which they call the Roes." Pugh remarks that "the streets are sunk by excavations, many feet below the present surface of the ground, so that the kitchens are now as many feet above them." Many ingenious explanations have been adduced for the original building of the streets in this manner; some say that the lumbering waggons wore the surface of the unpaved roads, the loosened soil was constantly removed and the roadways were gradually worn lower than the houses, thus causing the inhabitants to build structures below the buildings; others affirm that the rows served as a defence; from them the natives could drop sundry heavy articles upon the heads of the raiding Welshmen who rode through the city on their rough mountain ponies. Be that as it may, there are few towns in England where there are any rows, and nowhere are they so fine or so famous as at Chester.

"The Feathers" is in Bridge Street Row, the building on the site of the inn where Adam Martindale "was kept close prisoner" and where "the charge was considerable." He was made to pay eightpence for a meal "besides all extraordinaries, and marshall's fees." It was certainly rather hard to have to pay the man who locked you up but it was the regular custom. There was another celebrated Chester inn either here or in Foregate Street (opinions differ)—the "Blue Posts." In 1558 or 59 Dr. Cole, charged with a royal commission to

punish the Irish Protestants, stopped on his way to Dublin at the Blue Posts, where the innkeeper, Betty Mottershed, overheard him, as he flourished his parchment, exclaim, "Here is what will lash the heretics of Ireland!" Fearing for the safety of her brother or brother-in-law, John Edmonds, she, while he slept, looted his bag, abstracting the warrant and substituting for it a pack of cards, with grim humour placing the knave of clubs face uppermost on the top. When the Doctor opened his bag, safe on Irish soil, the guileless imbecile countenance of the knave leered at him but no warrant was there; and before he had time to return for fresh authority, Mary was dead, and his power was gone for ever. For this deed Queen Elizabeth granted a pension for life to Betty of £40 per year—no inconsiderable sum in those days. It is an interesting story and one it seems a pity to lose, yet some modern historians declare it to be a fable from end to end. "The oldest house in Chester" stands in Bridge Street. It is a half-timbered seventeenth-century erection, somewhat weak on its pins, which glories in the date 1003. Like a similar house in Knutsford the date lacks only the tail of the 6, omitted by a careless or humorous carver.

"The Grotto" does not look a particularly inviting place for the archæologist, but on descending to its lower room we find there the pedestal of three fine Roman columns standing *in situ*. Perhaps the soldiers of the XXth legion sat on the basements of these columns as they played knuckle-bones or tried their luck with dice, and to-day the youth of Chester contend with one another in a game of skill with these columns in the background, for a ping-pong table stands but a foot or so in front of them. Chester's Roman remains find strange settings; a column in Watergate stands in the basement of a butcher's shop, and two others, massive examples, supports of some former building of great importance — perhaps the forum — nestle amongst piles of children's toys in a shop in Northgate. The fallen pillars pass through the walls on either side of the

cellar, their unknown length hidden in the unexcavated premises beyond.

The Oldest House in Chester.

The Cross, the gilded City Cross, stood at the top of

Bridge Street. St. Peter's Church, the centre of Chester, had its steeple pointed in 1489, on which occasion the parson and other worthies devoured a goose on the top, throwing portions down to the crowds in the four streets below, for the four great streets meet at the Cross. Here was one of the places where the famous Chester mysteries and mock-heroic plays were enacted. Though we have recently seen the revival of "Everyman," there was much in the semi-religious, serio-comic mysteries which if produced nowadays would disgust any one with decent feelings; many of the characters dressed in the slightest garments, and some, such as Adam and Eve, appeared entirely without clothing, while suggestive and foolish comic touches were introduced into the most serious representations of Holy Writ. In the proclamation, read at the High Cross when the show began, the plays were declared "to exhort the minds of common people to good devotion and wholesome doctrine" by "the declaration of divers stories of the Bible, beginning with the Creation and the Fall of Lucifer, and ending with the general Judgment of the world." The city guilds each took their special act or scene of the play, performing first in one spot and then moving to another, so that in turn each stage or position saw the whole performance.

At the commencement of the seventeenth century exciting scenes began to be constantly enacted at and near the High Cross. Here, where in 1606 gaping crowds stared in wonder at tight-rope dancers who performed on a rope stretched high above the street, the excited populace gathered around the "sheriffs-peers, and common-council" who welcomed King James I. on his memorable visit. Fine was the show in Chester when Royalty graced the city with its presence, but finer, the records say, was the gala when the Duchess of Tremoyle, mother-in-law of Lord Strange, entered some twenty years later; "so many knights, esquires, and gentlemen, never were in Chester together, no, not to meet the king James."

In six years another visitor passed the High Cross, William Prynne. Again the people shouted and cheered; Prynne might have been a royal visitor rather than a prisoner on his way to Carnarvon. Portraits and bills were printed, and sold easily, though next year as many as possible were seized and publicly burnt by the authorities at the High Cross. The rival factions in Chester in turn had their day, for when a few years later Sir William Brereton caused a drum to be beaten for the Parliament, he was with difficulty saved from the fury of the mob. Brereton was arrested, but discharged, and next month King Charles was received in the city with honour. Chester was loyal.

Chester was but one scene in the long series of troubles which followed the Revolution, and it suffered more than most other towns. Besieged and relieved, attacked repeatedly with more or less success, the city experienced more than its share of the horrors of war. The suburbs fell into the hands of the resolute Puritans, and at times portions of the walled town itself were occupied, till after the fatal battle of Rowton, Charles left Chester, telling the garrison to hold out for eight days—giving himself time to escape—and then if no help arrived to treat for terms.

Eight days! Was Chester's loyalty to be measured by eight days, the time fixed by a craven king! Breaches were made in the walls and as quickly repaired; savage assaults were answered by as savage sallies of the furious garrison; bridges of boats were constructed to replace the ruined Handbridge, but failed to let in the attacking Roundheads. Famine and pestilence swept over the beleaguered city till grass grew at the High Cross, for all the energies of the defenders were needed upon the walls. Randle Holme, an eye-witness of the horrors, has left a half-racy account of the terrible time. Brereton, always bitter against Chester, was throwing all the strength he could muster against it, and meanwhile cutting off all hopes of food supplies, till horses, dogs, and cats were

eagerly devoured by the starving citizens, who kept a Lenten Christmas.

"By this time," says Holme, "our women are all on fire, striving through a gallant emulation to out-do our men, and will make good our yielding walls, or lose their lives to show they dare attempt it. The work goes forwards, and they, like so many valiant Amazons, do outface death and dare danger, though it lurke in every basket." While the men fire from the turrets and house-tops, these gallant women, "clouded with loyal dust," carry up basket after basket of earth to mend the breach. Meanwhile the cruel guns throw shot after shot into the stricken city. Granadoes fall in the streets and burst; "two houses in Watergate-street skip joint from joint, and create an earthquake, the main-posts jostle each other, while the frightened casements fly for fear;—the grandmother, mother, and three children are struck starke dead, and buried in the ruins of their humble edifice." "About midnight they shoot several more, one of these lights in an old man's bed-chamber, almost dead with age, and sends him some days sooner to his grave, than perhaps was given him. Six more breake in upon us, one which pursuades an old woman to bear the old man company to heaven, because the times were evil."

And so the eight days stretches out to twenty weeks; till the ruined, starved citizens and the wearied, reduced garrison, driven to extremities by their wounds, hunger, and the bitter severities of winter, yield to the superior forces and capitulate. Whichever side we may consider was in the right, wherever our sympathies may have been, we cannot but look with reverence upon the gallant defenders who in their loyalty held their city for the sake of a king who had deserted them in their sorest time of need.

In 1683 the wind had veered; the violent mob welcomed Monmouth, letting their passions free and looting the cathedral and the houses of many of the more wealthy citizens; and

when, four years later, King James II. paid a visit, he left "not much satisfied with the disposition of the people."

Deep snow and fearful frosts thinned off the prisoners of the 1715 rising who were confined in the Castle, then so full that the assizes were held at Nantwich; and when Bonnie Prince Charlie threatened to capture the town, fourteen days' provisions were laid in and the sally-ports were walled up Sixteen carts full of surrendered rebels passed through the city to Chester gaol when this ill-fated expedition failed.

Brereton's soldiers had thrown down the High Cross, but the place was still the centre of the city, and even in the last century was the scene of municipal festivities. The mayor and corporation attended the bull-baits at the Cross in their official robes, participating, as Dugdale says, in the sights of its enjoyments. In stentorian tones the crier proclaimed, "Oyez! Oyez! Oyez! If any man stand within twenty yards of the bull-ring let him take—what comes." Dr. Cowper succeeded in stopping the attendance of the authorities, and other aldermen attempted to suppress the disgusting scene, which was finally abolished in 1803, long before, to Chester's credit, the custom was abolished in other places.

The Watergate is perhaps the most interesting of the streets. Almost the first house of note is God's Providence House, elaborated with devices upon its fine timber and plaster. On the beam immediately above the Row is the inscription—"God's Providence is mine inheritance," and the date on the gable is 1652, though below is the honest statement, so often missed out, "Reconstructed 1862." As a matter of fact the reconstruction was mostly within, the front was restored exactly to its former beauties. The story of this house is somewhat doubtful; it was built or rebuilt by its owner in gratitude, for it is said to have been the only house in the city that escaped the plague. The worst plague in Chester was the sweating sickness in 1506, which carried off ninety-one householders in three days. "The remark," says

Pennant, "of this destroying angel's respect for the fair sex, was here verified, only four perished." In 1603-4, probably the plague referred to in the story, over thirteen hundred persons perished within six months, and more died before the pestilence was finally stayed.

In the cellars of Quellyn Roberts & Co., wine merchants, close to God's Providence House, there is a beautiful crypt, well worth visiting. Having received a ready permission we dive into the recesses where barrels and bottles are stored round the arches that support the groined roof; beyond are other ancient cellars, plainer in appearance being simply arched over, but very old. Randolph de Blondeville, it is supposed, built this crypt about the year 1180, but for what original purpose is not known.

Bishop Lloyd's House is another splendid example of early seventeenth-century domestic architecture. There are two gables, the lower one being the more elaborately carved; the subjects of the scenes carved on the eight squares just above the Rows are well worthy of study, they are biblical scenes quaintly delineated.

In 1772 a serious accident happened in what is now called Puppet Show Entry; at an exhibition a large quantity of gunpowder was unfortunately ignited and the audience were terribly injured, twenty-three of them being killed. Of course capital was made out of the occurrence, and a narrow-minded Quaker, one Thomas Brackenbury, published a pamphlet-poem entitled, *The Explosion: or an alarming providential check to Immorality.*

At the corner of Nicholas Street is the "Yacht Inn," whose gables and timbers are concealed by stucco. Dean Swift, on his way to Ireland, put up here, and was evidently neither pleased with his quarters nor his reception in Chester. He scribbled on one of the windows:—

> Rotten without, and mouldering within,
> This place and its clergy are all near akin!

The magpie timbers of the Stanley Palace catch my eye before I see the narrow entrance that leads to the historic house, once the home of the Earls of Derby and built in 1591. At that time the garden extended to the Watergate, of

Bishop Lloyd's House.

which the Earls were custodians. In 1651 the Earl of Derby, Sir Timothy Featherstonehaugh, and Captain Benbow were tried for conspiracy against the Parliament. The Earl attempted to escape, and the good lady of the house shows me an underground passage through which she says he went

and also the secret room in which, for some time, he lay hidden. He was recaptured and finally beheaded, unjustly it is said, and Featherstonehaugh was shot in Chester market-place.

There are many other places of interest in Chester; time is too short for me to visit them all, but near the Castle is a modern building, the Grosvenor Museum, that I cannot miss. This building was erected under the patronage of the Duke of Westminster in memory of Charles Kingsley, the founder of the Chester Society of Natural Science, Literature, and Art. Canon Kingsley, ever anxious to promote the love of science, during his never-to-be-forgotten residence in Chester, founded a little natural history club in 1871. To realise the work that this Society has accomplished it is only necessary to walk through the fine Museum, to see the objects of archæological and historical interest, the collections of local fauna, the examples of art, and the rooms for technical instruction, for the building now belongs to several proprietors, municipal authorities and scientific and archæological societies working hand in hand for the intellectual welfare of the town.

Before I leave the town let me quote the strange description given of Chester by Lucian, the monk, who wrote about the twelfth century.

"And whilst it casteth an eye forward into the East; it looketh towards not only the See of Rome, and the Empire thereof, but the whole world also, so that it standeth forth as a kenning place to the view of eyes, that there may be known valiant exploits, and the long train and consequence of things." . . . "which city having four gates from the four cardinal winds, on the east-side hath a prospect towards India, on the west toward Ireland, north-eastward the greater Norway, and southward that straight and narrow Angle, which divine severity, by reason of civil and home discords, hath left unto the Britons."

Sleepy Chester! Looking out towards the whole world as

a kenning place! Yes, perhaps; but say rather, Sleeping Chester! Chester, the city of the Dead, Chester the Ancient. Older than busy, bustling Manchester; older by far than that great city of Birmingham; a seaport whose fleets traded with the world when the great Port of Liverpool was but a handful of hovels beside the Mersey pool. A most ancient, hoary-headed city compared with your huge Metropolis, oh ye quizzical Americans! though to do you justice, you know how to appreciate its history and relics of the past.

One word more. When that ponderous lexicographer, Dr. Johnson, closed his description of Chester in 1774, he remarked:—"Chester has many curiosities." Indeed it has!

CHAPTER IX

TARPORLEY, BEESTON, AND PECKFORTON HILLS

Leaving Chester by Watling Street I pass by the river where it bends round the Earl's Eye, close to the old ford where many of the defeated Royalist cavalry crossed the river when flying from Rowton Heath. The church and all the important houses in Boughton, this suburb of Chester, were burnt in 1643 by the besieged Royalist garrison to prevent their occupation by the Parliamentarians.

It was an angry crowd that gathered at Boughton, in 1554, round that cruel stake, heaped with faggots, where George Marsh was doomed to suffer. There were two sheriffs of Chester then, but only one of them was in charge of the execution. Sheriff Cowper was there, watching the preparations; round him were collected a knot of brave men who, e'er the fatal fire was lighted, attempted a rescue. But the sheriff's guard was too strong and Cowper and his allies were driven back, driven even to Holt Bridge, where they escaped into Wales. Cowper was unsuccessful, and for his gallant attempt suffered outlawry and the loss of all his lands, but his name will ever be honoured by Cheshire men.

At Holme Street, which I passed when approaching Chester, there is an occupation road across the fields which leads to Hockenhull Hall, the seat, at one time, of a famous family of that name. Webb's "finely-seated comely house"

is no longer here, but in its place there stands a big square building of the time of Good Queen Anne, or thereabouts. It is built of brick with massive stone pillars and elaborate capitals at the corners and with heavy roof and window casings. It is now a dairy-farm, built to stand, for it is founded on the rock; the manure heap in the yard is in a hollow cut in the sandstone. Here again many of the windows are bricked up to save the window tax, and the front door, generally so fine in houses of this period, is converted into a window.

A grass-bordered lane brings me to the old cottages of the Moss and Duddon Heath and so to Duddon itself, where on a sign-post of the inn a slim lady dressed in flowing blue garments stalks majestically without a head. Generally inns with this sign are called the "Silent Woman," but this, as the old man on the hill by High Billinge knew well, is termed the "Headless Woman." But I will not pause to moralise on the only silent woman but pass on to Duddon Hall, a half-timbered building of some celebrity, only to find that the best gable, evidently too rotten to be safe, is being replaced by new timbers. Duddon Hall as an original timbered building is no more.

What a country this is for damsons! Not only are these typical Cheshire fruit-trees growing in all the orchards and gardens but they line the hedgerows round the fields and border the roadside where every passing schoolboy can eat his fill. In what other county can we see whitethorn hedges bordering the fields with damson trees rearing above them every few yards? Cheshire may well be famous for its damsons. Walnut trees, good old stagers, are plentiful round Duddon, lending great beauty to the country.

At Duddon a sign-post directs to Bruen Stapleford. There was a time when no traveller passed this way without calling at Bruen Stapleford, for John Bruen, the Calvanistic Puritan, kept open house, "the common inn of God's children who

came near him." "Many that passed between England and Ireland," says his biographer, "and came to Chester, would take up his house for their lodging place, that they might rejoice their hearts in seeing his face, hearing his voice, and conferring and advising with him." The name Robert le Brun occurs first in Cheshire deeds of the thirteenth century, and he may have been a bear; but this narrow, straight-laced old Puritan, who removed the Popish puppets from Tarvin church windows, was one of the most genial, generous, kindly gentlemen that England has ever known. Strictness in morals and matters of religion was a good fault in the later days of Queen Elizabeth and the early years of the Stuarts; Bruen, by his kindly peaceable spirit, won the hearts of many of his bitterest enemies. He hated the profanation of the Sabbath, and by providing counter-attractions for all right-minded folk, in the form of the best preaching he could obtain, he wearied out the "pipers, fiddlers, bearwards, players, and gamesters" who had converted Tarvin into a pandemonium. I have already mentioned how, in his youth, the attractions of music and dancing nearly led the young man astray in his uncle's house at Dutton; probably remembering this, he urged his cousin, Thomas Dutton, to refuse to grant licences to fiddlers and others to perform on Sunday, and succeeded in getting the antiquated licences altered accordingly.

"He never thought his table better furnished that when he had some godly persons to sit with him or stand about him, nor his meat better seasoned that when it was provided with the salt of wholesome words." But he did not only invite to his table those who could benefit him; he kept open house for the poor and needy, he fed and clothed his poor neighbours and distributed his doles to crowds of beggars from Chester. His fish-ponds, dovecotes, and flour-mills supplied food for the hungry, and his flocks gave them wool. When he first entered into possession of Stapleford the park was furnished with deer, but he disposed of them and his hawks

and hounds, "fourteen couples of great-mouthed dogs," for he desired to spend his money on others and not on his own pleasure.

Many gentlemen in the neighbourhood sent boarders to Stapleford to benefit by the society and teaching of the good man. Amongst these was the son-in-law of Thomas Wilbraham of Woodhey, John Done, the heir of Utkinton. Young Done and his wife appear to have spent a sort of educational honeymoon at Stapleford; the lad must have had but a sorry time of it, for his natural inclinations were for the good things of life. "We did all conspire," says Bruen, "to do him good, ten of my family speaking one after another and myself last, for the sanctifying of the Lord's Day; after which he did very cheerfully yield himself, blessed be God." Bruen's influence, however, showed itself to practical purpose in Sir John Done's after life, though I expect he was very glad when this visit was over; Utkinton Hall, under Sir John, shared some of the reputation of Stapleford for hospitality.

The old Hall of Bruen Stapleford is gone and forgotten, though the name of its master will, I hope, never share this fate; therefore I turn not at the post but ride on till a lane leads to Burton, for there still stands "the fine conceitedly built house of brick," that Webb mentions. In size Burton Hall is not imposing, but it is a charming example of Elizabethan architecture; it is square built with four equal gables and is adorned with the traces of much decoration. The garden is surrounded with a high wall and at the back there is a columbarium. The Werdens long resided at Burton: Robert Werden, colonel of horse under Charles I., looted all the plate and valuables from Utkinton Hall. His son, Sir John Werden, was Baron of Exchequer of Chester, and a great man under the restored Stuarts.

Whilst I am looking at this really beautiful old farm one of the farm-hands enters into conversation with me. So broad is his dialect that I can scarcely understand him, but he tells me

that there is a story concerning the house and two Dukes of St. Albans. Yes, there is, for Sir John Werden left no son

Burton Hall.

and his two daughters married on the same day the two sons of Charles Beauclerk, Duke of St. Albans, on the 13th of

December 1722, and the third and fourth dukes were descended from the unions.

Returning to Duddon I pass the church, and after a pleasant spin of a little over two miles arrive at Utkinton. All the history of Delamere Forest centres round Utkinton for it was the home of the Dones. The pleas of the Forest and other matters have already brought the Dones before our notice, but of many of the family but little is known; they served the Earl or the King as head gamekeeper, killing and perhaps getting killed in the execution of their duties. Fighting men were the Dones; when they were not engaged in the Forest they were in the forefront of the battle. A Done commanded Richard II.'s Cheshire guard in the Irish Wars, and two fell on the bloody field of Blore Heath. Sir John Done, son of Sir John who was killed at Blore, spent most of his time in feuds with his relations, and another Sir John, his grandson, I think, was given to like employment, for he it was who obtained the outlawry of Sir Piers Dutton, his kinsman.

The great gateposts of the garden, adorned with round stone balls, stand as they used to stand, but the space between has long been walled up; in the farmyard, however, are other fine posts guarding the entrance to the flagged yard in front of the house, and here I enter. The Hall has a strange irregular appearance; most of it is seventeenth-century work, but it has had many alterations and restorations at different periods, and a large part, it is said, was never rebuilt after it was plundered by the Royalists. There are, however, many timbers inside which date back to the sixteenth century, if not earlier still; the massive octagonal pillar, which rises from the centre of the great hall and supports the main beams of the roof, has a particularly ancient look. Irregular gables, rich ornamentation scattered about the garden as well as the house, and the more recently added brick dairy-rooms, make it exceedingly difficult to ascertain its date. The cheese-room, for Utkinton Hall is

one of Cheshire's most famous cheese-farms, is supposed to have been the chapel consecrated in 1635 by Bishop Bridgman.

Mrs. Wade, wife of the present tenant (the Wades have long rented it from the Ardernes, now represented by the Earl of Haddington, hereditary chief-forester and bow-bearer of the Forest) kindly shows me the interior of the Hall, and very interesting it is. The first thing that strikes me is the

Utkinton Hall.

beautiful cleanliness of everything about the place; it is a model of what a dairy farm should be. The kitchen and the great hall are provided with fine carved furniture, some the property of the owner, some of the tenant; the china in the plate rack, which stands above a lovely Jacobean chest of drawers, the oak settle, the open grate with its inglenook, are all fitting surroundings of the massive oak pillar that I mentioned before. Two life-sized figures, painted on wood

and cut out with a saw as if taken from an old panel, represent a running footman and a housekeeper. They are portraits, I am told; the housekeeper in quilted skirt carries a broom as her badge of office, the running footman bedecked in wig and wide-skirted coat, bears in his hand a franked letter. It is supposed that he ran from Utkinton to London faster than the coach; I hardly think he ran in that flapping coat.

As I wander in the quaint old garden with its shaded walks, its terraces and sun-dials, its huge vases for flowers, its strange carved animals and moss-grown walls; as I look at the old fruit-trees, at the great mass of mistletoe on the apple, at the old-world flowers that still are growing along the borders, I think of the last and best of the Dones of Utkinton. Sir John, who came under the influence of good old John Bruen, made Utkinton famous by his hospitality and generosity, but he was even outshone by the grace and kindness of his lady. Pennant tells us that "when a Cheshire man would express excellency in the fair sex, he will say, 'there is a Lady Done for you!'" and from what I hear, the saying is not yet dead in rural Cheshire. In this garden no doubt Lady Done walked, watching and tending her flowers and herbs, while planning her good deeds; doubtless she looked at the time on the fine old sundial which stands in the centre of the walled garden where the two chief pathways meet. The worn sandstone walls of Utkinton Hall are crumbling and weathered, the walks in the garden are grass-grown, the great gateway is walled up, but the name of Lady Done lingers still in rustic minds as the acme of feminine virtue and benevolence.

The road from Utkinton to Tarporley cuts through the living rock; up the hill from the little village I push my machine, ivy-covered sandstone walls rising on either side, till from the brow, where the old avenue to the Hall, though sadly thinned, still exists, I have a nice run to Tarporley.

Tarporley, famous for its race-meetings, headquarters of the Cheshire Hunt, is a regular country town. It is just far

enough from the railway—two miles from Beeston Castle Station—to keep it remote from the noise and bustle of the great North-Western line, but near enough to be in touch with the outer world. The houses that line the street are old-fashioned but not decayed, the few shops have an air of respectable prosperity without appearing too much up-to-date,

Tarporley Village.

and the "Swan Inn," with its bow windows and iron rails in front, looks what it is, an old coaching inn. It is not very ancient—not like the "Bear's Paw" at Frodsham—but its stables, above which is the room where the Cheshire Hunt meet, are older than the inn. The stable yard is entered by archways, and inside are galleries and outside staircases supported on round stone and wood pillars that recall the inns of Dickens's days. One almost looks round for Sam Weller

blacking his master's boots while chaffing a white-aproned, neat-capped chambermaid, and expects to see the elder Weller pulling on his great driving gloves with many pants and puffs.

At the Tarporley Hunt meeting, in the room above the

"*The Swan.*"

archway, the toasts are drunk in special glasses inscribed *Quæsitum Meritis.* In Leigh's *Cheshire Ballads* the hunt song is given, a song which Mr. Leigh says he heard an old Cheshire sportsman say he would rather have written than the *Annals of Tacitus.* One of the verses deals in no merciful way with pheasant-shooters; it does not seem to occur to the

hard-riding gentry that there is more than one legitimate form of sport.

> We hold in abhorrence all vulpicide knaves,
> With their guns and their traps, and their velveteen slaves;
> They may feed their fat pheasants, their foxes destroy,
> And mar the prime sport they themselves can't enjoy;
> But such sportsmen as these we good fellows condemn,
> And I vow we'll ne'er drink a Quæsitum to them.

How long is it since the churchwardens of every church in Cheshire willingly paid a shilling a head for each fox that was brought to them? The pheasant preservers might sing a similar song, calling to account the breeders of foxes which mar their prime sport.

Sir William Brereton selected Tarporley as one of the rendezvous for all the men from sixteen to sixty years of age who were ready to fight for the Parliament; at "Ruddy Heath" (Rhuddall), just south of the town, the raw volunteers received their baptism of fire, for on February 21, 1642, there was "a pitcht battell." Burghall tells us that "shots were made on both sides, but little or no hurt done." At Tiverton, hard by, the fight was more disastrous, several being slain on both sides. The writer of *Cheshire's Successe*, a very one-sided pamphlet, published the following month, states that the Royalists "triumphed in Chester; they had got Sir William's hat and feather, a great trophee, though upon examination it was found to be one of their owne souldiers."

At the far end of the Tarporley street stands the Manor House, which carries on its beams and windows two inscriptions. I cannot quite make them out, but Dr. Ormerod gives them in full.

"Ralph Done Esquyer, the lorde of this place was an eade to this buldyng in every case," is on one beam, and on another "John Wyttes 1586." Below the ledge of the window is carved: "Feneys quoth John Newsome hathe kept hys promes just, in buldyng of thys howse in Awgust, anno

1585." On a heraldic shield are four quarterings, with the arms and initials of Ralph Done, William Davenport, Hugh Cholmondeley, and Thomas Wilbraham.

"A splendid thing for ceilin's, the stuccy!" says old Loudon in the *Wrecker*, "and it's a vailyable disguise too"; but the "stuccy" on the Manor House at Tarporley is no disguise; it is a white screen that hides the beautiful timbering beneath.

Poor old Burghall! Perhaps scenting "the sever act of uniformity" from afar, he looked with dismay at the return of the bishops after the Restoration. He connected all manner of evil with their return; his narrow superstitious mind saw the Divine vengeance in every little calamity that occurred, but failed to see it in all that went wrong with himself and his friends. Bishop Walton passed through Tarporley on his way to Chester; the church bells were rung by the joyful townsmen, but, says Burghall, "a man was almost killed with the stroke of a bell."

Beeston Castle is one of the most prominent objects in the landscape from many miles round. The sandstone crag on which it stands rises over 500 feet above sea-level, and is entirely cut off from the neighbouring Peckforton Hills. Steep and thickly wooded on the north, and craggy and precipitous, even overhanging, on the west, the rock was naturally defended on two sides, and the double line of defences on the other two sides rendered the castle a valuable refuge in time of trouble. It is not surprising that Randle Blundeville, sixth earl of Chester, fixed his eye on this desirable spot, and in 1220 or thereabouts put up a castle, built on the lines of the Saracen strongholds that had given him and his companions so much trouble to conquer in the Holy Land. Such a desirable castle was not likely to escape the eyes of the Crown, and Henry III., on the death of John Scot, took possession of it, and for many years it remained a royal fortress and prison. When Henry of Lancaster defeated

the garrison of Richard II., he found that not only was it a fortress but a treasure-house; 200,000 marks was worth capturing. In 1460 it passed from the actual Crown to the Duke of York, and a few years later, having been battered by fight and growing old with three hundred years of wear, it is described by Leland as being in ruins. Since that date there has been little addition to the masonry, and the old stones put in position by the orders of Randle of Chester stand in their places to-day after six hundred years of storm and stress.

Fuller's description of the castle deserves repetition; he declares it "carried away the credit of the county for building," and adds, "I am much taken with the neatness of the structure, though, I confess my eye never did, and now never shall, behold it." A frank confession of this kind is decidedly better than the vivid descriptions of such places given by folk who have never been near them and yet dare not say so.

Thanks to Lord Tollemache this historic site is open to the public, and large numbers of visitors, attracted by the interest of the old castle and the commanding views, picnic here in summer. An outer wall surrounds the lower slopes on the vulnerable side, but it is not of any great strength; the old gatehouse is converted into a lodge. The next line of defence is utterly ruined, and that too was probably only used as a preliminary check to hostile forces. Here the ground, terraced where marquees are set up on fête days, was probably the scene of many an ancient gala, when tilting and other athletic or warlike games were enjoyed by the lords of the soil. The castle itself crowns the summit of the rock, and here all the ingenuity of defence is discernible. A deep ditch or fosse carved in the solid rock surrounds the great walls, ending abruptly on the precipice at either end; it is a waterless moat, many feet deep, an awkward place to struggle into and worse to get out of. A bridge now crosses this excavation to the steep steps that lead to the narrow, tower-

guarded gateway; this is probably not very ancient, and replaced the original drawbridge and portcullis. Some idea of the impregnability of the situation can be gained by standing at the outer ends of this ditch, where the massive stone walls rise from the rugged sandstone crag, quite unclimbable from the level more than three hundred feet below.

The castle itself is a wreck; the antiquary may perhaps trace chapel, guard-house, living rooms or banqueting hall, but the ordinary visitor sees little but an enclosed grass-grown courtyard, with here and there a few dislodged stones, traces of former buildings. Moss-grown and ivy-clad, the great gateway stands ruined and forlorn, yet when we think of the storms it has weathered, of the assaults of musketry and cannon, of the exposed position, open to all the fierce winds of heaven and the slowly rotting influences of the round of seasons, we cannot but wonder that it stands at all. These thirteenth century workmen knew how to bind their stones one to another; which of our modern buildings will be standing in the year 2586?

In the centre of the courtyard, sheltered by a little modern shed, is the well—a most necessary adjunct for an isolated castle. Three hundred and sixty-six feet they tell me is the depth, leading to the level of Beeston Brook which flows down in the valley yonder; the old tradition said that the Gowy flowed under the rock, which it did not. Leaning over the parapet looking down into that black hole, I follow the light of a candle which one of the castle-keepers lowers into the depths by means of a windlass. As the light descends it illuminates the straight hewn walls, till as it nears the bottom it dwindles down to a tiny spark; no wonder that men feared to be let down into that gloomy mine. There was treasure hidden in the depths said always accurate tradition, and long, long ago a trusty servant volunteered to search for and recover it. He went down, but he came up again lacking both treasure and power of speech, and when he

departed this life soon after, he had never been able to reveal the horrors and mysteries of the well. There are few places nowadays which some one is not willing to investigate, either for the sake of treasure or adventure, and when it was decided to clear out the rubbish which was filling the well, there was no difficulty in finding workmen. For some time they toiled, sending up bucket after bucket of stones, soil, and litter, and when they finally reached the original unbored limit of its depth the only object of interest unearthed was a fox's skull. Had poor Reynard tumbled over in too eager chase after a rabbit, or had some vulpicide, to screen his terrible sin, hidden the carcase? Perhaps; but there is one other possibility; there may be some inlet from the outer world by which fox and water reached the well, or perhaps where, in the depths of the rocky fastness, the mythical treasure is stored, to be revealed—when?

The last flutter of Beeston was during the Civil Wars. Edward Burghall was schoolmaster at Bunbury when the troubles began, it was not till 1646 that he removed to Acton to become vicar; his account of the early actions round about Beeston may therefore be taken as fairly accurate. Though Beeston was probably in the hands of Royalists when the struggle commenced, the Puritans do not seem to have had much trouble in first gaining possession; even before war broke out they had mended the breaches in the walls with mud banks and cast up earthworks, and in 1642 a garrison of three hundred men took possession. Had these three hundred been led by a resolute man and been without traitors in their midst the fortunes of the Parliamentarians might have been very different, for at one time it looked as if all Cheshire was lost to the Parliament save the hotbed of revolt at Nantwich.

One dark December morning ere daybreak eight resolute men, led by that threatening-letter-writer, Captain Sandford, scaled the steep crag and gained the ditch. Unnoticed the gallant captain and his "firelocks" clambered up the strong

walls and reached the inner ward, where, in spite of the tremendous odds, they demanded surrender. Captain Steel, terrified by their success and knowing not how many more might be following, invited Sandford to his room and there sat down with him to breakfast, sending up beer to refresh the handful of men who had taken him by surprise. Then after parley, though we know not what actually passed, for Sandford was a capital hand at bluffing, Steel yielded up the castle, stipulating only that he and his men with arms and colours flying might march unmolested to Nantwich. It was a strange triumphal procession that entered Brereton's headquarters, and when the news leaked out the angry townsmen set upon Steel, and would have slain him on the spot had not he been rescued to be cast into prison. In his subsequent trial he was condemned for treachery, and Burghall tells us that he confessed his sins and died penitent, shot by two soldiers in Tinker's Croft.

The Cheshire Roundheads gathered near the rock, but for some time the garrison was too strong for them, and all they could do was to prevent the assaults on the town of Nantwich itself. Gradually, however, they closed round Beeston and stopped supplies, and for months the garrison was hemmed in on every side. The besiegers raised "a brave mount, with a strong ditch about it, and placed great buildings thereon," but scarce had they completed these preparations when the news came that Rupert and Maurice with a vast army were encamped at Newport and that a relieving force was hurrying towards Beeston. Once more the Nantwich men retired to their town, and the two princes rescued the garrison and looted the district round wherever they found sympathy with the Parliament. At Beeston Hall Prince Rupert dined with the lady of the house, and then repaid her hospitality by informing her that she must pack up her valuables and quit, as it was necessary for him to burn the house so that it could not again be occupied by defenders. He is stated

to have apologised, but what good is an apology when one's house is burnt.

The siege was not raised for long, and we find, even after the Nantwich forces were withdrawn, that sixteen men held Ridley Hall gatehouse against the Beeston garrison, and that the Tarvin forces were watching the district to the northward. So once more the Royalists were shut up in the castle until their stock of provisions and fuel was nearly exhausted. How long these gallant few would have held out we do not know, for the utter rout of the King's forces at Rowton and Hoole altered the complexion of affairs, and on November 16, 1645, Captain Vallet, after nearly a year of constant fighting and privation, surrendered to Sir William Brereton, obtaining generous terms. For the second time a little army —only fifty-six men this time—marched out of the castle with flying colours and beating drums, taking two cart-loads of goods with them to the Royalist stronghold at Denbigh. Twenty weary men, however, craved leave, which was granted, to deliver up their arms and return home, and when the Parliamentary forces, after standing aside to allow the only half-defeated garrison to march out, entered they found naught but a piece of a turkey pie, two biscuits, and a live peacock and peahen in the hunger-stricken fortress. Next year the fortifications were demolished and Beeston Castle was again reduced to the ruin in which it has ever since remained.

The old square tower of Bunbury Church rises among the cottages of Higher Bunbury two miles to the west, and thither I repair, dropping easily down the long hill to the source of the Gowy.

The River Gowy, here but a clear, sandy brook, divides the village into two parts, Higher and Lower Bunbury. Delightfully irregular, the charming little village looks as if the streets had been built round the houses which had first been dumped down anywhere. The church, a venerable pile, with an open parapet and tower and chancel showing traces of ancient work, was

founded as a college about 1386 by Sir Hugh Calveley, though it is supposed that some of the building was erected sixty years earlier; the hoary old yew in the churchyard was not planted yesterday; perhaps its branches supplied the archers

Bunbury.

of Sir George Beeston. The effigy of Sir Hugh lies in the chancel, a huge figure, nearly eight feet long, in coat of mail, beautifully carved in alabaster. His head reclines upon the family crest, the head of a calf emerging from a ducal coronet,

and his feet rest on a lion. "He was a man of teeth and hands," says Fuller, "who would feed as much as two, and fight as much as ten; his quick and strong appetite could make him digest anything but an injury." From his large effigy, his traditional accomplishments, and a misunderstanding of heraldry have arisen some strange stories; he was a giant who could eat a calf at a sitting, and the figures—a calf and a lamb—signify his inordinate appetite. Fuller says this is wrong, that they represent a lion and a lamb, emblematic of courage and meekness; but Thomas himself is in error, certainly never having seen them, since he had never been to Beeston, and he did not know that the lamb was really a calf. Fuller too upholds the story, derived from some armorial quarterings on his tomb, that he married a queen of Arragon, but history neither tells that he married or left children. From the pages of Froissart and Holinshed we glean much about the man—much too that is not to his credit.

One of the thirty champions who joined issue with thirty Bretons in 1351 on "Le Champ des Anglois," Sir Hugh Calveley acquitted himself well, but the Bretons were victorious and he was borne off prisoner to Josselin. At Auray, though he begged to be allowed to fight in front, he was given the command of the rearguard, for Sir John Chandos told him with tears in his eyes that there was no other man he could trust so well for that dangerous post, and Sir John was right, for the hottest attack was made in the rear. When the war was over, Calveley collected many of his old soldiers, and enlisting banditti sallied forth in search of further rows, taking service as a mercenary against Pedro of Castille; but when the Prince of Wales took sides with that cruel monarch, without further ado Calveley transferred his following to the enemy and did signal service at Navarete against those who had employed him.

"Smoking byres and shrieking women, and the grewsome

sights o' war" were bread and cheese to Sir Hugh, what did it matter upon which side he fought? So we find him later, two thousand brigands at his back, "making much disastrous war and doing much damages" in the lands of the Earl of Armagnac, and when deputy-governor of Calais lighting the morning sky with the flames of twenty-six burning ships in Boulogne harbour while his men sacked the town and retired "with a rich bootie of goods and cattell." He "slept not on his businesse" but next year spoiled Estaples, entering the town on fair day and forcing goods and money from the wretched merchants by threatening to burn the town. After a successful attack on St. Malo and terrible excesses on the Brittany coast, an expedition in which he shared the command with Sir John Arundell got into trouble in a storm; the ships were wrecked and all the thousand men drowned save Sir Hugh and seven sailors who were washed ashore on wreckage.

Perhaps this was a lesson to him, perhaps the shrieks of women and the groans of the wounded rang in his ears when he was tossing on the waves, for after a few more years of adventurous career he returned to Cheshire and posed as a good man, giving a hospital to Rome and founding the college at Bunbury out of his ill-gotten gains.

Within the altar rails stands the monument to a finer soldier than Sir Hugh. Sir George Beeston, when eighty-nine years of age, fought against the Armada, commanding the *Dreadnought*, one of the four ships which in the forefront of the battle broke the Spanish line; for his signal services he received the honour of knighthood. Thirteen years later he died, if the dates are right, at the age of one hundred and two, and was buried here. The sexton, commenting on the old hero, tells me that people live to a good old age in Bunbury; a few years ago a villager died at one hundred and seven, and an old lady still lives who can eat a beef-steak and who gets up each morning at five o'clock, although she is ninety-nine.

The Egerton Chapel, containing the arms and memorials

of Sir Raffe Egerton, standard-bearer to Henry VIII., is separated from the body of the church by a fine stone screen, and the oak door into the chapel is beautifully carved with rounded open lattice work, while the somewhat damaged coat of arms on the inside has a very German appearance and is most excellent work. Three stone stalls, a double-holed piscina, and some chained bibles are other interesting objects in the church, and my communicative sexton friend, who is justly proud of the place, produces for my inspection two curious pewter collecting boxes which are dated 1696.

Thomas Aldersey, a London haberdasher of the Aldersey family, purchased the rectory when Calveley's college was dissolved, and leasing the tithes to Ralph Egerton, founded what he thought would become a classical school. Mr. Aldersey's first vicar was Christopher Harvie, whose verses are quoted by Isaak Walton. Piscator says he "hath writ of our Book of Common Prayer; which I know you will like the better, because he is a friend of mine, and, I am sure, no enemy to angling."

> What? pray'r by th' book? and common?
> Yes, why not?
> The spirit of grace
> And supplication
> Is not left free alone
> For time and place,
> But manner too: to read, or speak by rote,
> Is all alike to him, that prays
> In's heart, what with his mouth he says.

Then there was William Williams, vicar from 1761 to 1813, father of Sir John Williams, better known as Judge Williams, a Manchester Grammar School lad, who made his reputation as junior counsel for Queen Caroline; and there was also our schoolmaster friend Edward Burghall, in whose diary we find frequent mention of Bunbury. Poor old narrow-minded superstitious Burghall, how he used to see nought but pity in the

calamities that befell his friends, and nought but Divine judgment when the afflicted one was his enemy. He suffered much persecution, but that did not seem to trouble him so much as "the Quakers, a giddy, absurd sort of heretics, holding partly with the Papists, partly with the Anabaptists, and partly with Antinomians." When they came to disturb him at Acton, he tells: "I so ordered my studies, that the sermon was pat against them."

One shilling, we find in the parish books, was in 1669 "Pay'd for Liquor for the Clocke and Bells." In 1731 there is another entry which carries us back no further than old folk can still remember in some of these parish churches.

"P'd Richard Pennington for whiping dogs, and cobing sleeping Folke." Can we not see old Richard, puffed up with his half-sovereign salary, promenading the aisles and rapping unruly small boys and weary rustics on the head with his staff, or chasing the erring and unhappy sheep-dog from pew to pew?

Bunbury men, by the way, were proud of their dogs. They loved to pit them at Wakes time against the travelling bulls, which came round to be baited, armed with leaden knobs to their horns, so that the dogs might not be gored. When the unlucky dog was not fortunate, and got tossed yards into the air, the owner would run in at considerable risk to himself to catch his falling darling. So too when the bear was chained to the stake to try its luck, the odds were rather against the dog. The bear wore a great leather muzzle, both to prevent it from biting the dog and to protect its head from the savage bites of the aggressor, and its hindquarters were encased in strong sacking. The dog, whose owner paid twopence for the privilege of trying it, had to overthrow the bear, and then it was dragged off, and another dog tried its luck. The bear seldom suffered anything worse than a rough tumble and the loss of a mouthful of fur, but the dog sometimes experienced a warm embrace that crushed its ribs and put it *hors de combat.*

"Old Nell," one well-known bear, came annually to Bunbury for fifteen years, and when she had finished her day's exercise, and was released from the stake, she would quietly trot round the corner to the "Nag's Head" yonder and curl herself up to sleep in the shippon.

Hind, one of the ministers, and Burghall did all they could by preaching and warning to stop the bear-baiting, but without success, for it was not until 1833 that the sport was discontinued. Burghall's diary commences thus:—

"There was a remarkable judgement fell upon a wicked, debauched fellow in Bunbury, one Robinson a bearward, who followed that unlawful calling, whereby God is much dishonoured (especially at those popish festivals called wakes), was cruelly rent in pieces by a bear, and so died fearfully. That worthy man Mr. Hind, who preached at Bunbury, had, not without cause, much inveighed against those disorders which were usually at Bunbury wakes, and had threatened God's judgements against the same, but could not prevail utterly to remove them, tho' he endeavoured it to the uttermost: but in due time God makes good his word in the mouth of his ministers to the confusion of the wicked." Some years later he states: "A multitude of people being set under the church-yard walls, on the south side of the church at Bunbury, at the time of the wakes, to see a bear-bait; the wall suddenly fell down upon them, yet they were not hurt; they had the same disorder the year following, and there happened the same disaster, and the same deliverance. Oh the great patience of Almighty God!"

Returning towards Beeston, the long wooded slopes of the Peckforton Hills rise before me, the modern Peckforton Castle, a fine mansion, being right at the northern end of the ridge, for Beeston is detached and stands alone. To the west wood and moorland, and here and there an outcrop of red rock, bound the road, which gradually rises towards the pass. "Green-yellow, bursts from the copse the laughing yaffle," linnets twitter

on the gorse bushes, and brilliant tiger-beetles, green even on the green heather, skim on whirring wing on these semi-moorland tops. As I run south the woodlands gradually cease; whin, broom, and ling replace the firs and oaks, and the top of Bulkeley Hill and the bare moorland scalp of Bickerton remind one of the eastern uplands.

Slowly rising, I notice on my left how the view grows, until near the top of Gallantry Bank, a little beyond the disused copper mines, worked by Egertons three hundred years ago, I rest and look down upon the wide Cheshire plain, broken only by the low hills south of Nantwich, while from Mow Cop, rising like a great tumulus, the eastern range stretches away to the northward. There is the hog-backed Congleton Edge, with Biddulph Moor behind, there is Bosley Cloud, quite unlike the steep escarpment that we see from the north and east. Blue beyond, between the Edge and Bosley Minn, are the jagged tops of the Roaches, far away near Leek, and to the north, like huge cetaceans, are the heather-clad tops of Axe Edge and Whaley Moor, and all the other highlands of the Derbyshire border, stretching away to the misty top of the High Peak itself.

Immediately below, between us and Cholmondeley, is Egerton country, birthplace of the ancestors of the Ellesmeres and Bridgewaters. There is Egerton and Ridley, Bickerton and Bulkeley, names familiar with students of the Egerton pedigree. Ridley Hall, the home of the Egertons, was burnt early in the eighteenth century, that is to say, all that was left of it, for during the Civil Wars it suffered considerably. There are but few traces of the old outhouses, chapel, and gateway now to be seen, though for many years they were converted into farm buildings, and the gateway was deservedly famous. Leland tells us that "syr Wylliam Stondley, helper to king Henry VII." owned the place, and "made of a poore hold place the fairest gentleman's house of al Chestreshyre"; but Sir William Stanley, as we know, received little thanks from

the man he had helped to crown, and finally lost his head after he had got at cross purposes with his master by asking for the Earldom of Chester, the accusation being that he had spoken in favour of Perkin Warbeck. "This was the end of sir Will. Stanleie, the chiefest helper of king Henrie to the crowne at Bosworth Field, against king Richard the Third, and who set the same crowne first upon the king's head, when it was found in the field trampled under feet." So Holinshed tells us, and then the property passed to Ralph Egerton of Ridley, son of Philip Egerton of Egerton, who was knighted and made standard-bearer for life by Henry VIII. for his gallantry at the battle of the Spurs.

This, the rise of the yeoman family of Egerton, was the commencement of a sad time for the once powerful family of Stanley. Good Catholics, though truly loyal, they suffered under the Elizabethan persecution, for all now admit that the great queen was almost as bigoted as her sister. Stanleys "papiste and excommunicate" figure in the parish registers, buried in the darkness of night without the last rites; and we find Sir George Bromley, all honour to his name, pleading the cause of the poor widow Lady Egerton of Ridley, summoned to appear as a recusant. "I have been acquainted with her longe, and have alwaies known her in other respects to be very well given, and, in regard thereof, do pitie her the more. I would be glad that, by gentle means, and by conference with some grave and learned men, she maie be perswaded and wonne (iff it maie be) whereof I have some good hope."

Sir Ralph Egerton died, and the property passed to his son Sir Richard, but it was an illegitimate son of his, child of one Alice Sparke of Bickerton, that founded the great family. Sir Richard, when this lad was sixteen, sent him to Oxford, whence he went to Lincoln's Inn and qualified for the bar, showing from the very first great promise. Passing steadily and rapidly up the ladder of fame, just and honourable as he was clever, Thomas Lord Viscount Brackley and Baron Ellesmere became

one of the greatest Lord Chancellors that England has ever known, earning alike the respect and reward of Queen Elizabeth and James I. In 1617 he died, and was buried simply and quietly in the parish church of Dodleston.

There was once a famous mere at Ridley which it is said our old friend Nixon prophesied should be sown and mown. Certainly it was drained some hundreds of years ago, so that the prophecy was fulfilled, and it is now "a goodly meadow for hay."

Once the top of the bank is reached all collar work is over for miles; the road seems to drop the whole way to Farndon on the Dee. On the left is Bickerton Hill, a heathy upland, wilder and more exposed than the more northern hills of Peckforton, though the trees cover its lower slopes, hiding from view the cave known as Mad Allen's Hole. After a short drop the road runs fairly level for a space, and there is time to look at the beauties of this bit of hill scenery in the midst of the plain. Spoil banks and outputs from the long-neglected copper mines now only lend a touch of colour to the dark green of the firs; bracken, larches, beeches, and oaks present their lighter greens. Harthill, a lower rounded bluff, is tree-clothed to its top; it hides the modern Bolesworth Castle on our right. To the left the clean-cut western edge of Bickerton, straight and level, shows where are the earthworks of Maiden Castle, overlooking Broxton Hall, a fine half-timbered mansion; and in front the land seems to slip away from view over the edge of Barnhill and the inferior but beautiful wooded slopes of Broxton.

There is no keep or embattled pile at Maiden Castle; there never was. The deep double fosse and rampart were dug and thrown up by men who understood the art of making camps before the Normans or even the Romans had introduced masonry walls. Here on this naturally defensive site, the steep bluff of the sandstone scar giving protection on the one hand, the British camp was placed; here still remain the earth-

works from which the rugged skin-clothed warriors looked out over the defenceless valley of the Dee.

Ormerod says there is a fine view from Barnhill, that little mound away below us to the west, but it is nothing compared with the view from here, while from the earthworks of the Castle a finer vista still is mapped out before us. Like a silver snake the Dee twists and winds along its broad level valley, and on a clear day we can see away beyond the spires and towers of Chester the gleam of the estuary waters. The Welsh hills rise lead-blue mounds against the sky, and far away in the south is that solitary Midland landmark, the Wrekin.

At Barnhill, where a road leads to the left to Broxton Hall, a very pretty but little-known old house shows through the trees. Glegg's Hall is stone built, and its three weathered gables look cosy and old-fashioned peeping through the greenery; it stands on the hillside looking northward towards Chester.

The family of Brocks wore a badger for their crest, and there are badgers still in Broxton; it is just the country for this retiring, harmless, plantigrade beast. We shall not see one, however, for each happy family is safe within some great mound enshrouded in those thick woods; only at night do they creep forth, playing amongst the firs and oaks, and grubbing for wasps' nests amongst the roots.

It does not take many minutes to drop below the hills, over the railway, where at Broxton Station there is a big cheese warehouse, indicative of the rural Cheshire industry, to the parkland of Carden. Carden Hall is a beautiful example of black and white; we get a good view of the front from the lodge; it stands at the end of a fine avenue, and there is another rather better view a little farther down the road. There is a way through the park to Tilston, a mere track, but rideable. Along this path we can ramble beside the rocks of Carden Cliff, low sandstone crags, and every now and then we obtain a fresh glimpse of the old Hall. The Lower Hall,

more to the south, is also picturesque, but it cannot compare with Carden Hall proper.* Like nearly every other country seat of any importance, Carden suffered severely during the Civil War.

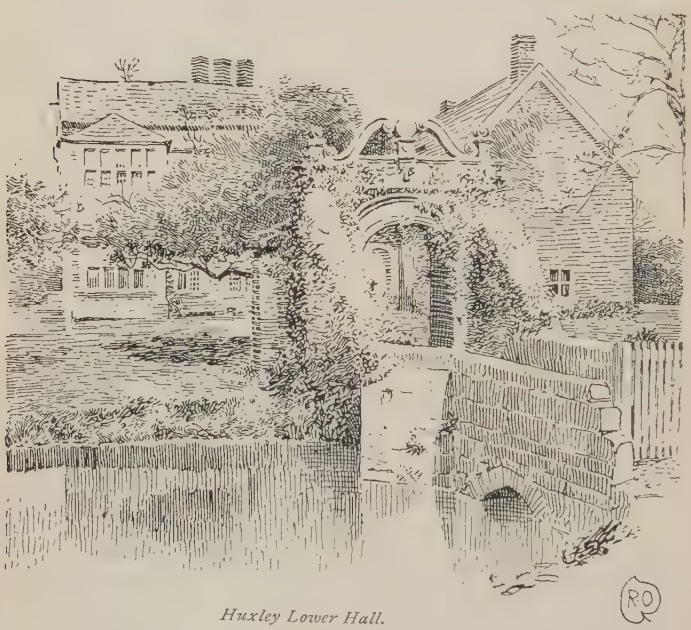
The Whitchurch road is one of the best in this neighbourhood; therefore I return, walking my machine up the steep hill to Broxton Station, and then riding north until I reach the turning for Tattenhall. The village of Tattenhall reminds me a little of Tarporley; there is an air of rural prosperity about it. A grand old walnut, round which the martins are circling, stands in front of the big brick Hall. A little beyond the village I cross the line at Tattenhall Road Station and the Shropshire Union Canal by the bone works, and almost immediately am in Huxley, the manor which William de Hockenhull granted to Richard, ancestor of the Huxleys of Huxley.

There are two halls at Huxley, which at one time belonged to different branches of the family; but the Lower Hall is decidedly the best to-day. The first glimpse I catch of the farm is not encouraging, for I see a new brick wing. Wishing, however, to visit the place, I turn up the occupation lane that runs to the farm buildings, and am rewarded by finding one of the most beautiful moated granges in Cheshire. A brick building with heavy stone corners, mullioned windows, and a general air of ancient respectability is surrounded by a perfect moat; but perhaps the best part of the whole is the double-arched moat bridge and the ivy-covered gate that guards it. In 1644, when Colonel Croxton garrisoned the Hall during the long siege of Chester, this gate would be well watched, for at that time it was the only approach to the house. Now a modern bridge crosses to the farm-yard, but without injuring the beauty of the place.

In September 1891 Thomas Henry Huxley and his wife "made pious pilgrimage to the cradle of his name"; doubtless when the great man of science viewed this charming spot he

was glad that he had been induced to visit it, though his son tells in the *Life and Letters* that his father used to declare: "My own genealogical inquiries have taken me so far back that I confess the later stages do not interest me."

There seems little doubt that the great Huxley was descended from this Cheshire family, "but the historian of



Huxley Lower Hall.

Cheshire," says his son, "records the fact that owing to the respectability of the name, it was unlawfully assumed by divers 'losels and lewd fellows of the baser sort,' and my father, with a fine show of earnestness, used to declare that he was certain the legitimate owners of the name were far too sober and respectable to have produced such a reprobate as himself, and

one of these 'losels' must be his progenitor." Was the ancestor, we may ask, that William de Huxley, who in 1322 was indicted for burglariously breaking into the Castle of Halton? He pleaded that he was a clerk, but the bishop would not own him, so the jury found that as he was one of a gang of felons who burgled castles and the like—though his share of the booty was but one "bacinetum," valued at sixpence—he was no clerk but a common robber. Like enough the Baron of Halton had had many a sixpence out of him in "thistletake" when he had driven his cattle across the barren lands near Halton.

At Hargrave, where but one stone buttress attached to some out-buildings remains of the Old Hall, I cross the canal by the steep little bridge of Golden Nook, and then proceed to Hatton, the seat of Sir Piers Dutton before he laid claim to the manor of Dutton. Here nothing of the ancient Hall remains; a modern farm stands within the moat. The Duttons of Hatton needed a moat, for they had constant feuds with the Grosvenors and Cottons, and more than one of the family were outlawed. Probably they cared little for outlawry, but retired within their moat and challenged the rival houses to turn them out and hale them before the judge. Then down the country lane, perhaps the very one I ride along, would trot a little band, armed to the teeth, returning next morning with the flocks and herds of the tenants of Eaton and Saighton Grange. Hatton Heath, where I turn towards Chester, was then no doubt a wild open moorland where the bodies of any tenantry of the outlawed Duttons would probably be gibbetted. It was only safe, in those days, to serve the strongest master.

All this rich cultivated valley of the Dee was, but two or three hundred years ago, wild open moorland; and on September 24, 1645, Rowton Heath, that part of the moorland just without the city suburbs, was the scene of one of the fiercest and most decisive of the battles of the Revolution.

Rowton and Christleton show little traces of heath land

now; the battle-field as it appeared then has long been built over. There is nothing very ancient in this part of the outskirts of Chester, for the Royalists burnt every house of importance that might serve as a garrison or a redoubt for the attacking Roundheads. Thus all the oldest buildings were destroyed, and Christleton appears a neat modern suburban village. It was here that Randle Merton, to spite the authorities, cut the water pipes that crossed his land; no municipal water scheme this, but a gift, dating from the thirteenth century, of a fountain of good spring water to the Abbey of St. Werburgh. It was next door to sacrilege to cut these pipes, for were they not for the benefit of Mother Church? Randle got himself into serious trouble, for the Church then generally scored in all legal actions, whether it were in the right or not.

So I ride back into Chester, and return to my hostelry, ready for next day's journey into the country 'twixt Mersey and Dee.

Beeston Castle.

CHAPTER X

WESTERN WIRRAL

It is hardly possible to realise that the waters of the Dee once washed the walls of Chester at the Water Tower; but from here on a clear day the old river bank is plainly visible, Blacon Point, a high-banked headland, standing above the flat lands of Sealand. Verdant fields, far as the eye can reach, stretch away to the north and west—lands stolen from the sea, politically belonging to Flint, the artificial navigable "Cut" having been constructed far on the Welsh side of the old river bed.

Blacon was the southern limit of the great Forest of Wirral, which was evidently more of a tree-grown forest than the other two Cheshire hunting domains.

> From Blacon Point to Hilbree
> Squirrels in search of food
> Might then jump straight from tree to tree,
> So thick the forest stood.

This is Mr. Leigh's version of the old quatrain which is so often wrongly quoted. I have seen Formby Point substituted for Blacon and cited as a proof that the Mersey did not flow by its present channel, but joined the estuary of the Dee south of Hilbre. Probably the Mersey did not always enter Liverpool Bay by its present channel, but if so the stream most likely entered the sea between Wallasey and Meols.

The Forest of Wirral was the earliest to be disforested; though long after Norman days it was ruled by the Stanleys and others by the right of the Horn.

Leaving Chester by the Northgate, I travel past Bache Hall and the Asylum to the two Mollingtons, from where I look down upon the villages of Great and Little Saughall. Great Saughall was made famous at the close of the seventeenth century through the infirmities of a poor woman, Mary Davies.

> You that love wonders to behold,
> Here you may of a wonder read,
> The strangest that was ever seen or told,
> A woman with horns upon her head.

The unhealthy growths, termed horns, "sadly grieving the old woman, especially upon the change of weather," were the means of Mary Davies's livelihood, for she exhibited herself "at the sign of the Swan near Charing Cross" to a wondering public. Many people of note went to see her, and as at certain periods she managed to shed her horns, they were purchased for museums and private collections. "One of them an English lord obtained, and presented it to the French king," while others found a resting-place in the Ashmolean and, it is said, the British Museum. Before she was thirty she began to grow horns, and for over forty years she supported herself on the profits of her excrescences.

The road from Chester to West Kirby is a fine one, well paved and in most places fairly level; it does not take long to run from Great Mollington to the corner for Shotwick. The windmill on the way is called Gibbet Mill, but no roadside gallows now decorates the highway side. At the time when mouldering malefactors swung in their chains by the roadside the pavement was not in the same condition that it is now. It was not unusual for the Chester and Parkgate coach to require six horses to drag it through the mud.

The second turning to the left is the one to take for Shot-

wick ; it is a narrow lane between luxuriant hedges, and drops towards those flat lands that border the Dee. Shotwick in fact stands on the edge of the ancient tide-mark. There are

Shotwick Church.

men living who can remember shooting bernacle geese from behind the shelter of the churchyard wall.

Shotwick Church has an old tower, but the rest of the

church has been restored. It retains, however, its original form, having only one aisle, and in this aisle stands a grand example of an old "three-decker" pulpit. The whole interior of this church is most interesting, for it still retains the box pews, and one at the west end, for the churchwardens, which is dated 1673, has a wooden canopy above it supported on turned oak pillars. A fine Norman doorway is somewhat hidden by a quaint timbered porch. It seems a shame that the Norman work should be covered, and yet this rough porch is so old that it would be a pity to lose it. When Saughall was boomed for its horned woman, Shotwick gained fame from the writings of its vicar. Dr. Samuel Clarke's *Martyrology*, a sort of revised "Fox," is well known.

The ancient residence of the Hockenhulls of Shotwick is gone; but the house erected by Joseph Hockenhull in 1662 remains, overgrown with ivy and creepers and looking very snug within the little walled garden when seen through the fine gateway. In the fifteenth century the Hockenhulls claimed for their right all fish captured in the Dee where it touched their property, with the exception of whales, thirls-heads, and the royal sturgeons: these were the right of the Earl. The "Greyhound Inn," in the stranded riverside village, was not built yesterday: the great stone chimney, which is in strange contrast to the old red bricks, is well worthy of notice. An older building still, Shotwick Castle, one of the fortress guards for Chester, stood more than a mile away up stream. Nothing but a mound and earthworks now mark the site.

There used to be a rough lane which led beneath the old river bank, but it no longer exists. There is, however, an uneven and grass-grown lane by the Hall which ends in a field path and leads to Puddington. There are several stiles over which we must lift a cycle; but this path is so direct that it is quite worth while to use it.

William Rufus gave the manor of Puddington to Hamo de

Masci, "with bonds and limits from heaven above to hell beneath," and stipulated that Hamo was "to hold of me and mine with Bow and Arrow when I shoot upon them," sealing the contract with his "wang tooth." William Massey, last lord of that name in possession of Puddington, fled from Preston after the rising of 1715. Fearing that the Mersey bridges would be watched, he swam his horse across the wide estuary to Hooton, and urged the jaded beast across Wirral to his home. It fell dead at its stable door. Massey seems to have tried the same ruse as Dick Turpin, for when near his home he thrashed an unoffending countryman, who of course summoned him for assault. When he was arrested later he brought this summons to the notice of his judges in order to prove an alibi; but the countryman got his revenge, for William Massey was frozen to death with many other unfortunates in Chester Castle.

Puddington Old Hall, though very much altered, still stands. Some of its timber and inside walls, and a great chimney-stack from the kitchen, date back many hundred years. John Pleasington, the family priest, hid in a secret chamber in this chimney, but he was captured soon afterwards, and suffered at Chester for alleged sedition in 1679. The later Masseys, adhering to the Catholic faith, had but a sorry time. In the wall which surrounds the remains of the moat there are several heraldic stones, much broken, which were rescued from the fire when the New Hall was burnt down some forty years ago.

Of all the Deeside villages Burton is perhaps the most attractive, with its white thatched cottages and its worn sandstone bed-rock footway along the single street. The Bishop of Lichfield and Coventry owned Burton, and under ecclesiastical law his tenants were allowed to keep dogs uncrippled by the "dog-gauge." Elsewhere within the Forest all dogs had to pass their fore-feet through a small gauge or ring, only one inch and a half by half an inch in size, and if too large the unfortunate animal's feet were whittled down until they would go through. Little fear of the poor lamed creatures hunting the

lord's deer or hares after this cruel process. Save at Burton sheep dogs could not be much use in Wirral.

Burton.

Burton has just changed its owners. For more than a century it belonged to the Congreves of Congreve and Stretton ;

now it has passed by purchase to the Gladstone family. William Congreve, poet and dramatist, lies in Westminster Abbey, where he obtained a place through the influence of the Duchess of Marlborough, his more than patroness. He was a brilliant man undoubtedly, but his plays are too full of the coarseness of his day to be read now. He left his considerable fortune to the Duchess, though Young the poet and others consider it would have been more seemly if he had bequeathed it to poor Mrs. Bracegirdle, the heroine of his plays, whom he had thrown over for the more influential Duchess. The Duchess, whose portrait, along with that of the dramatist, hung in Burton Hall, squandered this money in such things as a diamond necklace, an ivory clockwork figure, and a wax effigy of her late favourite, whose lifeless feet the silly woman daily wrapped in bandages as she had wrapped those of the gouty Congreve before.

Congreve of Stretton supported King Charles II., and was to have been one of the knights of the Royal Oak. The institution of this order was dropped, but Congreve received a picture of Mistress Jane Lane, the lady who, by pretending the king was her servant, effected his escape on horseback after he had spent that most uncomfortable day in the Boscobel Oak.

Many of the Congreves have been noted warriors. General Sir William Congreve invented the war rocket which bears his name; but of all the family the name of Major Congreve, V.C., must be uppermost in our minds. We are not likely to forget the battle of Colenso and that brilliant dash to save the guns, so brave though so ineffectual, when Lieutenant Congreve earned his well-merited honours and Lord Roberts's son fell.

Thomas Wilson, Bishop of Sodor and Man, was born in a little white thatched cottage, still standing in Burton, in the year 1663. The village school and the master's house were built by him, and he framed careful rules for the well-being of

the free scholars. The master, before his little flock depart in the evening, must exhort them to say their prayers morning and evening, to be dutiful to their parents, and not to take God's name in vain. Bishop Wilson lies in Kirk Michael Churchyard, where on his tombstone is a touching tribute to his modesty and worth :—"This monument was erected by his son, Thomas Wilson, a native of this parish, who, in obedience to the express command of his father, declines giving him the character he justly deserves. Let this island speak the rest." The island does, and Cheshire too is proud of the good man who "kept beggars from everybody's door but his own."

The fir-crowned rocky headland of Burton Point is a landmark from all over the broad marshes which it overlooks. Six feet of water washed the foot of the bluff at low water two hundred years ago, wearing away the sandstone foundations; need we wonder that in 1399 the Cheshire archers, the pick of Richard's army, embarked here for Ireland? Below me, as I stand upon the headland, stretch miles and miles of saltings, tidal sand and slub, for the high tides wash the embankment of the railway which crosses to the swing bridge at Connah's Quay. Far away, across the Dee Cut which creeps along the Welsh shore, black clouds of smoke rise upwards from the Deeside towns, veiling the lower slopes of the heather-clad hills beyond; the steam from the racing Irish Mail, so far away, seems but to crawl below the foothills. Beside the railway there are other embankments, battered and broken by the fierce tides of long ago, which were built to reclaim the land. Natural causes and the Dee training wall have accomplished what they failed to do; save at high tides there is a great expanse of sheep-nibbled grassland, and the embankments now serve for refuges for the sheep when the shallow water drowns the saltings. Yonder a man is crossing the waste; he turns and twists, sometimes walking towards us, sometimes away; it looks a strange proceeding, though he is

but avoiding the deep tidal gutters which intersect the marsh in every direction. Here, on the grass, the little dunlins feed in crowds, or paddle in the mud by the gutters, probing deep in the slub with their long bills; here the yelping redshanks scream at the intruder, and the broad-winged heron rises from the pool where he has been spearing dabs. There was a colony of herons in these firs at Burton, and the birds love to linger near the spot, wading deep in the salt pools.

In winter, when the bitter salt-laden wind sweeps over the flats, and the fierce hail and sleet sting like a whip-lash, the rocks of Burton are a welcome shelter; then, spite of the driving storm, the wild geese fly over on strong pinion. What grand birds they are! right in the teeth of the gale they come, yelping like a pack of hounds. Gabriel's hounds, superstitious folk call them in many places, when they are heard at night.

> Oft have I heard my honoured mother say,
> How she has listened to the Gabriel hounds—
> Those strange unearthly and mysterious sounds,
> Which on the ear through murkiest darkness fell;
> . . . . . .
> A spectral huntsman doomed to that long moonless chase.

Most of these geese are pink-footeds, though in former years bernacles resorted to the marshes in hundreds, and at times other species are met with. The sporting colliers of Denhall, pothunters from Chester and elsewhere, and a few professional puntsmen keep these birds on the move during their stay, giving them plenty of exercise without thinning the flocks to any extent.

On the shore, below Burton Point Station, is a small white house where lives Mr. James Kemp. Small as the house is, Mr. Kemp farms a very large share of those broad flat acres; his huge flocks of Scotch sheep wander over miles and miles of salting, but are easily gathered when the threatening tide is rising by his well-trained and intelligent dogs. Many years ago the inhabitants of Burton and Denhall were astonished by the

strange behaviour of a new arrival, a man who came from Lincolnshire. William Kemp soon gained the title of "Billy th' Duck," for at all hours of the day and night he put out in his flat-bottomed punt and roused the echoes with his massive gun. Sometimes he was so successful that he would return with so many as thirty geese, which at half-a-crown apiece in Chester market was not a bad day's or night's work. His son learnt the art of wildfowling from him, and taught himself even more; on those trackless wastes, in those intricate gutters, he could find his way on the darkest night and in the thickest sea-fog; the "lums and gorings" of the "wild roads" were nothing to him. "Billy th' Duck" would occasionally kill thirty geese in a night, his son has slain thirty-five at a single shot.

Wildfowling is over now for James Kemp; the weight of years and a prosperous sheep-farm keep him at home, but his heart is still amongst the birds, and he loves to talk, and without boasting, of the old sporting days. Somewhat bent with much stooping in the punt or crouching behind the embankments when "flighting," tanned by the fierce winds and weathered by exposure on the wildest nights, he is nevertheless a fine broad-shouldered man. His keen eyes look out from beneath heavy eyebrows, and like all men who have had much night-watching in their lives, his brows are contracted; but his frown, if frown it can be called, is not one of ill-humour, but only of set determination; when he went for ducks or geese he meant to get them, and he generally did. Courteous and open-handed, this marsh farmer is a type of the yeoman of old; but he is more than that, he is one of the last of the old school of wildfowlers.

The upturned punt leans against the farm wall, the great gun, which has thrown pounds and pounds of lead amongst the frightened fowl, stands in a corner of the barn; the peaceful sheep browse on the short, hot grass, and the blue water, down below Parkgate, shimmers in the sun. There is little to

suggest danger. But when the white foam comes roaring o'er the level sands, when the wild nor'-wester whips the spume from the racing white-horses or drives the dense sea-fog over the saltings, we can realise what suggested to Kingsley his well-known verses:—

"O Mary, go and call the cattle home,
And call the cattle home,
And call the cattle home,
Across the sands o' Dee;"
The western wind was wild and dank wi' foam,
And all alone went she.

The creeping tide came up along the sand,
And o'er and o'er the sand,
And round and round the sand,
As far as eye could see;
The blinding mist came down and hid the land—
And never home came she.

Denhall Collieries, rather a blot on Deeside, were opened so far back as 1750; at first the coal was conveyed from the galleries, which burrowed nearly two miles under the tide, through underground canals, the boats being forced slowly along by one of the colliers lying on his back and pushing with his feet on the roof. Now ponies and tramways are used, as in other mines.

Between Denhall and Moorside—an outlying part of Neston—stands the Old Quay House, where two hundred years ago there was thirty or forty feet of water in the channel. The quay itself has long since gone, but the old ferry house, sometime used as a prison, marks the spot where the Irish packet berthed and where merchant vessels loaded and unloaded. The river passage to Chester was impeded so far back as the days of Richard II.; then Shotwick Quay was used. Silting continued on the upper reaches until the sixteenth century, when the "New Kay" was constructed, and then all went merrily until Parkgate was left stranded and Liverpool and

Holyhead had grown. The Quay House became a private residence, where it is said Samuel Warren wrote his *Ten Thousand a Year.*

Neston, thanks to the railway, is now a market town of some importance; it is, however, full of quaint old houses and cottages, and the old vicarage, though its date is not known, is a house worth observing.

Miss Anna Seward speaks of Neston as she found it in 1794 when on her way to Hoylake. "With the odd ancienty of Chester," she writes to a friend, "we were much amused; it renders that city perfectly unique. Provokingly detained at Neston by waiting for horses, we were obliged to borrow the two dusky hours from seven to nine for travelling. They obliged us to take four, which being miserable Rosinantes, had difficulty enough in dragging us over roads of frightful ruggedness. If an infant Cynthia had not shed her pale gleams propitious, though faint, I know not what would have become of three cowards beneath the clouds of night and in roads so perilous.

"The clean and lonely village on the extreme verge of the peninsula is properly called Neston, originally, I suppose, Nest Town. It is indeed a nest from the storm of the ocean, which it immediately overhangs. We find pleasure in contemplating its neat little church and churchyard on that solitary eminence lashed by the tempestuous waves." Miss Seward's waves must have been tempestuous indeed to have lashed the inland church of Neston.

Dugdale, writing of Neston in 1819, says:—"The inhabitants derive considerable advantage from the contiguity of Parkgate, which has of late years become a convenient and fashionable bathing place. It is also celebrated as the station for some of the packets for Ireland, which generally sail to that country four times a week. The houses of Parkgate are chiefly disposed in one long range on the Dee banks, and are mostly neat modern buildings of brick. The inhabitants, who are

rather numerous, derive their principal support from the expenditure of the visitants who reside here in the bathing season." What were Llandudno, Colwyn, Rhyl, Blackpool, and Douglas like in 1819? Surely seeing how these places have grown within the last century Parkgate should be a city now! A city! Look at poor old Parkgate to-day, and you will not talk of cities.

Less than a mile from Neston I turn seaward, and enter Parkgate, the village "all on one side" as the saying is. Weston Point received its death-blow from the increase of commerce; lack of this valuable commodity and natural decline have slain Parkgate. As I turn round by Mr. Grenfell's school, once the old "George Hotel," and see the long line of decayed inns, hotels, and fashionable lodgings fronting the crumbling esplanade, and as I look seaward at the miles and miles of sand and glacial mud and the far distant shrimp boats lying over on their sides in the Gut down by Gayton, I cry "Ichabod!" Where are the busy coaches? where the packets at the quay? where the bathing vans, and gaily dressed ladies? where is the very quay itself? All vanished. And the poor old hotels—converted into cheap lodgings—look careworn and forlorn, while big-booted jerseyed fishermen and barefooted, short-skirted women tramp the wet sands towards the boats which can no longer get nearer Parkgate than the distant Gut.

Navigation of the Dee was difficult in the fourteenth century; in 1422 the commerce of Chester was lamentably decayed by reason of the "abundance of sands which had choaked the Creek," and in 1560 a collection was made in all the churches of the kingdom to raise a fund to build the "New Kay" or New Haven. Then Parkgate was born; a mere collection of huts for workmen at the busy quay. One hundred years later we find the place a prosperous port carrying nearly all the Irish traffic, both passengers and goods. Still the shifting sands caused inconvenience, and Yarranton says, "in the month of

July, 1674, I was prevailed with by a person of honour to survey the River Dee running by the city of Chester to the Irish Sea, and finding the river choked with sand, that a vessel of 20 tons could not come to that noble city and the ships forced to lye at Neason in a very bad harbour, whereby the ships receive some damage, and trade is made so uncertain and changeable that the trade of Chester is much decayed and gone to Leverpoole." Various improvements were, however, made and Parkgate and Neston were kept busy by the New Quay, till at the close of the eighteenth century Pennant informs us that ships of 350 tons burden could reach the quays. There was moreover plenty of water at this time at Parkgate, and as the glorious institution of summer holidays was becoming general the village laid itself out to cater for a sea-bathing public. Coaches galore brought their loads of holiday-makers and passengers for Ireland; the hotels were full, and the lodging-house keepers reaped a harvest; Parkgate, in fact, was one of the gayest towns in England. In 1754 Mrs. Delaney wrote to a friend: "We have good reason to think we shall sail this evening—had we not come to Park Gate as we did, we should not have found room. People come every day, and the place is crowded."

Most of those who crossed to Ireland about this time and who left any record of their passage seemed to have been impressed by the perils of the sea; John Wesley, however, having a calm sea, shut himself up in his travelling chaise and employed the time in reading the life of a notorious murderer. The crossing varied in point of time according to the wind, but thirteen or fourteen hours was considered very fair. Many of the boats were lost and the disasters were often terrible; in 1758, about seventy passengers of the *Dublin* were drowned, and we read in the account published at the time that the crew of the boat only consisted of a master, three sailors, and a boy. In an October gale in 1775 two more boats foundered,

and in 1806 the *King George* broke up on Hoyle Bank, only three or four being rescued out of upwards of one hundred and sixty passengers. Certainly all the boats were not unseaworthy, for Mrs. Gamlin states that in 1897, an old Parkgate packet, built ninety years before, was still trading between Liverpool and Dublin.

In addition to the Irish packets, sailing ferry boats crossed daily to Flint; these boats were often very much overcrowded,

Parkgate.

causing much inconvenience as well as considerable risk to the passengers.

The beautiful Lady Hamilton, then Mrs. Hart, visited Parkgate in 1784 to remove some disfiguring eruption of her skin by the application of salt water. "You can't think," she says, "how soult the water is, and there is a many laidys bathing here." She was much troubled by the expense of the bathing horse and the cost of her dress, which amounted to the vast sum of 1s. 2d. per day. "It is a great expense, and it fretts me wen I think of it." Handel was another

visitor when on his way to Ireland; it is said that he composed the "Messiah" at the "George Hotel" while waiting for his boat. The Cheshire stories of Handel are somewhat twisted; Mrs. Gamlin's statement that the oratorio was performed for the first time in Dublin is probably the truth. When staying with Charles Leigh at Adlington, Handel played on the famous organ there, and was supposed to have composed the "Harmonious Blacksmith" after passing a tuneful smith and anvil near the village, but there is little doubt that this well-known piece is a variation of an old French air. Mrs. Fitzherbert was another summer visitor, renting a house on the front; and the London papers of the time give long lists of the "sea-dippers" at this fashionable seaside resort.

The training wall for the New Cut gave the death-blow to Parkgate; currents were altered, the steep bank up which the labouring horses dragged the bathing machines disappeared, and a great waste of sand silted up the approach to the esplanade; very soon the pier itself was buried beneath the invading sand. And what is Parkgate now? The "George" is a boys' school; the theatre where fashionable visitors went to see Liston, the elder Matthews, Miss O'Neile and Miss Foote, is now converted into a schoolroom; the Assembly Rooms may still be picked out by their elaborate but corroded balcony railings; the sea-wall which kept back the tide has little to do but restrain the encroachment of the mud. "To Let" and notices of lodgings are displayed on the windows of houses which once were never empty in the summer. Yet Parkgate is making a struggle; some energetic men have made an effort to revive the place, and I notice that many of the gables at the backs of the houses which a few years ago were in ruins are now repaired, breaches in the sea-wall have been mended, and the place generally restored. Many years ago, even before its days of prosperity, Parkgate was a great place for the herring fishery; that schoolroom, once a

theatre, was in earlier times still a curing house. Even in Pennant's days the herrings were dropping their annual visits to the Dee, and those which were caught were "shotten and meagre"; but the Chester hawkers to the present day, when their fish are particularly fine, cry them as "Parkgate herrings."

The tide is out. Across the waste of wet mud comes the mournful wail of the curlew, almost the only sign of life. Away in the far distance a twinkling line of foam is crawling onwards; the fisher-folk at Gayton are manning their boats; the carts which have taken down the heavy nets are returning to the shore. The beacon buoy in the Deep swings round; Bug Swash swells till Big Ben is covered; and the far-off Caldy Blacks sink beneath the wave. The tide is coming. Parkgate Deep is full, and the boats at Heswall and Gayton strain on their anchors; guts are now broad rivers and bank after bank is lost beneath the racing waters, for the sea comes in apace across the flats. Then the flood swings up, kissing the forsaken wall, yet so shallow that a brick ten yards away is barely covered, and almost at once all is over; the water is racing back to the ocean bearing on its ebb the shrimpers of Parkgate.

This then is what supports Parkgate. Shrimping and trawling, the fisher-folk make a fair living, and when the salmon are running up they often catch the best fish along the Parkgate shore, for salmon cling to the old channel and seem to dread the polluted waters of the New Cut.

The tide has come and gone so quickly that we can scarce realise that for a short period there was a stretch of water from the sea-wall to the far-off shores of Wales; harder still is it to believe that within the memory of folk still living a schooner was driven on a high tide up one of the narrow streets.

In the open space at the far end of the village cattle used to be penned after they had swum ashore from the Irish

boats; down these narrow passages the sea-folk lived, augmenting their incomes by smuggling and, it is hinted, by the far worse crime of wrecking. Smugglers and wreckers, fashionable bathers and cross-channel travellers have gone for ever from poor stranded Parkgate; but there is hope for the place yet. The air is just as good as it ever was, the western breezes are healthy and salt-laden, the distant hills of Wales are beautiful as of yore; improved railway facilities are turning all the Deeside villages into residential outskirts of Liverpool, and in time Greater Liverpool will reach Parkgate. Nearly eighty years ago a scheme was mooted to construct a ship canal to Manchester, and Parkgate was to have been the seaward end. Liverpool scoffed at the idea as it scoffed at the existing waterway.

> These lords of the shuttle,
> By a process most subtle,
> A canal mean to cut from the ocean,
> And the great Irish Sea
> They'll unite with the Dee.
> But its Fiddle de Dee I've a notion.

This was but one of many skits that appeared in the Liverpool papers. The Dee scheme fell through but Manchester has got its waterway, and whatever may have been the cost and labour it bids fair to prove a great blessing in the future. The canal would have converted Parkgate into a Weston Point or Eastham had it been possible to reach the ocean at this spot; now the place may become a much more desirable situation. We may live to see the tumble-down houses of Parkgate all rebuilt, and there are already many new houses on its outskirts; the toilers from the overcrowded city of Liverpool may rescue the village of Parkgate before it is too late.

At the end of the promenade the road turns by the old Ferry House and passes the gates of Leighton Hall—the Park Gates—and a little further on that splendid West Kirby road

is reached. For a short spell I use this road and then once more drop seaward to Gayton, a village which is growing. William of Orange stayed at Gayton Hall when on his way to the Battle of the Boyne, and he knighted his host, Sir William Glegg. In the grounds within sight of the road is a fine columbarium, built in 1663; the Wirral landowners seemed to have been fond of pigeon-pie for there are also good dovecots at Puddington and Irby. Gayton was a familiar name to dwellers on the Welsh shore.

> And Cambria's youth from Edwin's shore,
> An annual voyage take:
> What lass would stay on that side Dee,
> When Love 's at Gayton Wakes?

Running between the river and the heather-clothed Beacon Hill, dotted with new houses, I arrive at the little town of Heswall, now a flourishing residential place. Haselwell Hall was the name of a farm just outside the village, and a tablet on the boundary wall of one of the houses commemorates the site of the Hessle Welle. The old church has almost entirely disappeared, nought save the tower and some ancient fonts, carved stones, and memorials of past Heswall worthies remain.

There is still much unfenced heather-clad land on Heswall Hill, and the sandstone crops out here and there as we ride to Thurstaston; the air, the view, and the whole situation are delightful; no wonder that Liverpool men have cast their eyes upon these hills as desirable spots upon which to build their houses. The summits of Heswall Hill and Caldy Hill beyond were called the Beacons. Records of these beacons are few, but they were certainly in use in very ancient days; probably warning fires burnt here when Danish ships—black piratical craft with strange carved dragons on their prows—crept up the Dee towards Chester. On that historical night when, "like volcanoes, flared to heaven the

stormy hills of Wales," Heswall and Caldy fires would pass the message to Halton and Lancaster; a few years later instructions were sent to Cheshire and other counties to keep the fires ready and appoint reliable watchers. In pre-lighthouse days these beacons were used as guides for the Dee shipping, and a windmill on Caldy Hill became a mariner's mark; it was wrecked in a storm and a permanent landmark was erected in 1841.

Thurstaston Hall is close beside the church, a modern building, although the ivy-covered tower of the old church stands silent and detached in the churchyard. The Hall is a mixture; some parts are supposed to have been built five hundred years ago, others were added or rebuilt about two centuries since, and the east wing is quite modern; for all that it has a ghost, a little old lady who pulls a bell-rope, but I do not know to which part of the house she belongs. This old dame was kind enough to haunt an artist who was staying in the house, and he got so familiar with her that he made a rough sketch of her features while she was standing beside his bed; the portrait is much more successful than any of Mr. Stead's photographs of the unseen.

Irby Hall, once a grange of the monks of St. Werburgh, moated and fortified, stands a little to the right. The present Hall, which has a restored black and white front, possesses some good seventeenth-century work at the back, but the moat is perhaps all that remains of the Grange. The village of Irby is quaint and old-fashioned, especially a fine stone house which stands at the corner.

Thurstaston, now a famous health resort, is perched high on the breezy hills overlooking the sands of Dee, but where is the Port of Dawpool? An old Wirral hunting song tells of a wonderful hare that was started near the Point of Air, ran through Talacre and Mostyn, crossed the river and finally returned *via* Chester to Wales, where it ended its days. On the Welsh shore we learn—

Yett ye hare had care of her feete
For fere of falling in an ould cole pitte,

but nevertheless Puss found coal-mining convenient, for she crossed to Dawpool in a coal-boat. The only other passenger of note that I find record of landing at Dawpool was Dean Swift; he disembarked here in 1707 and then rode to Parkgate. "Dorpoll," or "Darpool," was one of the ports whence boats trading with Ireland sailed. In 1822 Telford, the great engineer, was busy building the Port of Dawpool; in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for that year, we find a report. "Independently of the general accommodation which packets would afford at that station, the ready communication between Dublin and the depot at Chester, where nearly 40,000 stand of arms are kept, and the warlike stores, is of vital importance, especially at a time when the sister island is in a state of dangerous fermentation." The point of embarkation was getting further and further from Chester, but Liverpool was then making rapid strides, and the port, if ever finished, was abandoned; now I see no trace of it at all.

There is a large detached rock or boulder on Thurstaston Common which has caused much speculation; the stone of Thor, Sir J. A. Picton considers it, and thinks the name of the place is "Thors-stane-ton," being erected by the Danes in memory of the battle of Brunenburgh. Would the Danes put up a stone to commemorate a defeat? Possibly it is Druidical, or it may have been left during those vast geological changes which moulded the hills of Wirral.

The villas of West Kirky cluster on the lower slopes of the beautiful Grange or Beacon Hill. Unlike poor Parkgate this seaside resort is yearly gaining popularity; not only do many people visit West Kirby for a summer holiday, but doctors send many weaklings to breathe the health-giving breezes and to rest their tired sick little bodies in the Children's Convalescent Home. West Kirby rejoices in a tradition, which

there is reason to think has good foundation; it was said to possess one of the earliest Christian churches in England. Certainly England was early Christianised by Irish missionaries, and as the church was dedicated to St. Bridget it is probable that they landed here and set up the Cross, but whether before or after they attempted to convert other places will never be known with certainty.

Rapidly as West Kirby has grown Hoylake has outrun it. When the prophet Nixon was asked what place would be a sanctuary in the evil days he foretold, he replied: "God's Croft, between Mersey and Dee"; this western extremity of a beautiful country is perhaps the most attractive part of "God's Croft." The golfer has annexed the sand-hills, a good thing for Hoylake but not so good for the local fauna and flora; yet the maram-clothed dunes and the marshy spots between them are beautiful with many coast-loving plants—little creeping roses, pale blue-grey sea-holly, thrift, and the yellow sea-poppy. Many of these levels, where the water lay in wet weather, are now converted into "greens"; the cry of "fore" and warning notices somewhat damp the ardour of the naturalist. Still the natterjack ambles across the flats, the lizard suns itself amongst the star-grass, the common blue butterfly clings head-downwards on the rushes when the sun is clouded over, and in March the dainty rare moth, *Nyssia zonaria*, hunts for its wingless spouse amongst the sand-hill plants.

Shops with glass-covered colonnades, smooth asphalted roads where the blown sand lies in ridges—delightfully clean dirt—a long ever-growing promenade, rows of neat lodging-houses and tree-lined streets are what we find in Hoylake to-day. How different all this is from the scattered, sand-buried village, smelling strongly of shrimps, where the cocklers once lived on the shore of Hyle Lake. The great East Hoyle Bank lies seaward, a breakwater to the fury of the Irish Sea, leaving the narrow channel, the lake, a quiet harbour. Two

hundred years ago this lake, then half a mile wide, was many feet deep close to the sea front, and crowds of large craft would shelter here till tide or wind was favourable; now at low water one may wade the channel, as the cockle-hunters do, and walk upon that mighty bank — but beware of the racing tide! The bustling Liverpool tugs pick up the sailing craft far away on the Welsh coast, and the shallow channel now shelters nought but a crowd of fishing boats, for though Hoylake has grown, its old industry is by no means dead. Women and men still rake for fluted cockles on the banks; there is an old term of reproach, originated by the cockle rakes, "The biggest scrat in all Hoylake."

Miss Seaward, I have already said, visited and described Hoylake in 1794; she remarks that "the glassy smoothness of this marine lake affords charming bathing for cowards." "High Lake," she continues, "is a new place. The house built by Sir John Stanley was finished only in 1792. The apartments are handsome and commodious, and the accommodation wonderfully comfortable for a situation without either town, or even village, in its neighbourhood." To this house, the "Royal Hotel," which then stood almost alone amongst the sand-hills, I repair, leave my machine, and prepare to follow the example of old pilgrims to Lindisfarne.

> Dryshod o'er sands twice every day,
> The pilgrims to the shrine find way;
> Twice every day the waves efface
> Of staves and sandal'd feet the trace.

"In the utmost brink of this Promontory," Camden informs us, "lieth a small hungry barren and sandy isle, called Il-bre." Just a mile from the weathered red rocks of Hilbre Point rise the three islets of Hilbre, sandstone bluffs covered with short, salt-encrusted turf, which it is possible at low tide to reach dryshod from West Kirby, though I prefer the shorter though wetter crossing from Hoylake. What is pleasanter

than a barefoot paddle over firm sands? Skirting the deepest pools and gutters I arrive at the edge of the "Lacus de Hilburgheye," or the "Heye-pol," and soon land on the island "where Deva weds the sea." Truly Leland was right, "the ground is sandy and hath conies"; for the rabbits prick up their pink ears and then dive out of sight into their burrows, and the wheatears chack and flirt their tails amongst the thrift. Then I cross to the largest island to do homage to the genial "King of Hilbre," Mr. Lewis Jones, resident officer of the Mersey Dock and Harbour Board.

There was a "Capella de Hildburgheye" so far back as 1081, but no trace now remains of church or monastic cell, and no "sort of superstitious fools," as Holinshed calls them, now "cherish and maintain" the monks of St. Hilburgh, although many years ago a devotional cross was discovered buried in the sand on the highest part of the island.

Richard, Earl of Chester, the unfortunate youth who was drowned in the White Ship, got into trouble with the fiery Welshmen when on a pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Winifred. After sundry deeds of valour he shut himself up in Basingwerke Abbey, and apparently by some occult means acquainted his constable, the Baron of Halton, that he was in sore distress. Fitz Nigel, whose knowledge of geography seems to have been faulty, hurried to Hilbre, where, of course, he was stopped by the sea; a monk, however, told him to offer supplication to St. Werburgh, and that sainted lady smiled upon him and divided the waters so that he could cross in safety to succour his lord and master. The great bank that surrounds Hilbre is often called the Constable Sands in memory of the event, or rather shall I say of the monastic legend.

There is a cave on the seaward side of the island, said to have been excavated by a monk. Mr. Egerton Legh has told the story in his ballad, "The Lady's Shelf."

There is a cave with pink flowers dight
(Bairns "Lady Cushions") call);
Hence you may gaze on Ocean's might
Far grandest scene of all.

One day the monk was visiting his cell when he discovered the apparently half-dead body of a maiden left by the tide at the mouth of the cave. He bore her to safety and then found that she was still alive; she recovered sufficiently to tell her sad story; how she was the Lord of Shotwick's daughter, how her lover, Edgar, had saved her from many perils, but that her father had refused to recognise him as a suitor, and how she had been betrothed to a Welsh knight whom she did not favour. When on her way to her new home, having been told that Edgar was dead, just when the boat was rounding the Point of Air she jumped or tumbled overboard, and her bereaved sire, when too late, called out that Edgar was alive and she might have him if only she would come back. Then she died. A very pretty story; a little like the history of Edwin and Angelina, and, I fear, just as unfounded.

Sir Edward Stanley, when reporting on the fortifications of Cheshire at the time of the Armada scare, declared Hilbre to be "a place very parlus if the enemy should possess it ever. The soldiers would stop our passage into Ireland." Spain, had she been able to capture Hilbre, might have held it as we hold her Rock of Gibraltar, but Hilbre is not quite such a difficult place to attack nor so useful when once obtained.

Hilbre Island, with its sheltered pool on the landward side is a favourite place of call for yachtsmen, who all know Mr. Jones and love to have a crack with him. They chaff him often but the laugh is generally on the wrong side. Mr. Jones takes a great interest in the history, archæology, and inhabitants of his domain, in fact what he does not know about Hilbre is not worth knowing, and his keen eye is ever on the alert for passing birds or marine creatures. Migratory ring ousels that stop to rest on passage, wild geese and swans—true wild

swans, hoopers and Bewick's—rare divers and grebes, seals and whales, all are noted. The sheldrakes that breed in the rabbit burrows near his back door, the cuckoo that lays its egg in the wheatear's nest, the arrival and departure of each migrant is watched with interest. One day he added a strange visitor to his list of island creatures; a young hedgehog turned up close to his house. Had it wandered across the sands? Had it swum ashore from some passing boat? Or had St. Werburgh kindly divided the waters for it to cross dryshod from Wales? Now it so happened that three lively yachtmen were visiting the "king" when this prickly urchin was discovered; to their great delight Mr. Jones held forth on the strange occurrence with great gravity, until it dawned upon them that he was remarking upon the curious habit of the hedgehog of taking a passage on a yacht. Once more he was too sharp for the jokers.

When the "Hyle Lake" was a refuge for Liverpool shipping the sailors used constantly to pull to the island, for in those days there was a more or less disreputable public-house there, kept by a curious couple whose character we learn from Richard Ayton, who visited Hilbre in 1813. They gained their living in many ways besides selling drink to sailors; there was plenty of smuggling then, and a bit of wrecking occasionally was lucrative, besides the pickings from the "silly sailor man" when his poor drowned body was washed ashore; at any rate the man and his wife, who was just as keen in these illicit longshore pursuits as her husband and like him wore trousers, amassed a considerable fortune, but what finally became of them I do not know.

It will not do to stay longer on Hilbre or I shall miss the tide, so I pull off my boots and stockings again, bid farewell to my island host, and paddle back towards the Cheshire shore for already the tide is swelling in Hilbre Swash.

CHAPTER XI

NORTHERN AND EASTERN WIRRAL

The whole coast from Hilbre Point to New Brighton was once lined with sand-hills which served one very useful purpose, they prevented the encroachments of the sea upon the low-lying marshes of North Wirral. Now, these sand-hills are cut up into little stretches, built upon in places, and elsewhere rented by golfers; between Leasowe and Meols the embankment renders them unnecessary. Near Dove Point, a name which the ornithologist connects with the stock-doves which formerly bred in the rabbit burrows, but which really is a corruption of "dhuv" or black, there is exposed a large tract of buried forest. These submerged forest-lands, which crop up all along this and the Lancashire coast, lie between the sand-hills and the sea; black turfy soil studded with stocks and roots of trees while ancient timbers lie prone half-buried in the earth. Some of these trees are of considerable size; they are oak, birch, and conifers, but the largest, black with age and waterlogged, have either broken up or been removed. Webb speaks of fir-trees buried in the mosses; "some are of opinion that they have lain there ever since Noah's flood," and tells how they are dug up for firewood or to make candle-lights, but he does not, as Mrs. Gamlin and other writers suggest, speak specially of the buried forests of Wirral; it is exceedingly doubtful if this tract of land was exposed in Webb's day.

The sea is fast eating into this mossland, showing the strange changes which the coast has undergone; for the shifting drift sand covered the forest, the trees rotted and fell, and the dunes rose high above their stumps. Then the sand was washed away or blown further inland, and once more the restless wave has laid bare the woodlands; from the deep inlets where the storms have torn away great masses of peat we may guess that it will not be very long before all traces of the forests have once more disappeared.

In these forests many strange things have been found; bones and teeth of wild animals long since extinct, boars and deer and cattle, horn-cores of the great wild *Bos primigenius* and of the smaller domesticated *Bos longifrons*. Roman and mediæval coins, instruments, articles of apparel such as buckles, pins, and clasps, metal implements of all sorts and a few spears, knives, and warlike tools have also been revealed. But more recent treasure sometimes turns up; one morning, Mrs. Gamlin tells how Sir Edward Cust came down to breakfast at Leasowe Castle and found no servant to wait upon him. At last a kitchen maid turned up and in answer to inquiries stammered out: — "Please, Sir Edward, they're all on the shore picking up goulden guineas." And there they were, butler, cook, and housemaid, stable boy and groom, gathering up a store of coins which a low tide had left exposed. These guineas were supposed to have been lost from one of the ships which carried the soldiers of the Prince of Orange to Ireland.

Bidston Hill, inland from Great Meols where I leave the shore, commands a far-reaching prospect of the Wallasey flats and the sandbanks of Liverpool Bay. The old lighthouse and the observatory crown the summit of the hill, and modern houses peep out here and there amongst the trees which clothe the slopes; Bidston is perhaps the healthiest and best situated residental district round Liverpool. Telford, I am told, stood on the summit of the hill, and looking east declared that Liverpool was on the wrong side of the Mersey.

The village of Bidston clusters round its old church at the foot of the hill. "It was a little quiet grey village—so very grey indeed and venerable and quaint, that no flaunting red brick had dared to show itself and break the uniform tint of its gabled antiquity," when Christopher Tadpole visited the "Ring o' Bells." "And the old Grange with its mullioned windows and its ivy-covered gateway was the greyest of all."

Bidston is grey to-day, but the red brick and the modern half-timber have dared to invade the heights above, and the "Ring o' Bells" is gone. A labourer whom I questioned about the old inn which caught Albert Smith's fancy can tell me nothing about it; he only knows the "Ham and Eggs." But the Grange is there, grey as ever, in spite of some alterations which were made in the early part of the last century. Bidston Hall, which Smith calls the Grange, is a delightful place, irregular and quaint; its gateway, "greyest of all," is decorated with three strange ornaments which for long were believed to represent two decanters and a punchbowl. This central "punchbowl" had been lost, but it has been restored from an old drawing, upsetting the tradition, for it is a similar ornament to the other two.

Round the Deer Park—deer park no longer—ran a great wall, very high and four feet thick at the base, built, it is supposed, by Royal grant in or about the year 1408. Bits of this wall remain, known locally as "The Penny-a-day Dyke," for that was the pay of the workmen who raised it, so local tradition informs us. It was an Earl of Derby who built the present Hall when James I. was king, but it did not long remain in the possession of the family. The heroic widow who defended Lathom House, when her estates were ruined by the Parliamentary wars, sold Bidston to a London lawyer, who parted with it to the extravagant Lord Kingston. Sir Robert Vyner, banker and pawnbroker to needy monarchs, foreclosed a mortgage and took the property, and in his family the estate has remained ever since. Sir Robert Vyner designed

our copper coinage, giving to Britannia the likeness of Miss Frances Stewart, one of the many favourites of his client, Charles II.

The story that the Bidston property was played for, lost and

Bidston Hall.

won on the ace of clubs is fiction. On the site of Mr. Vyner's house once stood a summer house, built in the shape or form of the ace, and here the conspirators of the Rye House Plot met together.

Monmouth had come to Chester ostensibly to attend the

famous Wallasey races; Sir Peter Shakerley acted as informer, and reported all that took place to the Court. The Duke rode his own horse and won the £60 plate, which he forthwith presented to his goddaughter, the Mayor of Chester's child; he afterwards raced on foot, both with and without boots, with a Cambridge man named Cutts, winning again in both cases. Bonfires were lighted in Chester to celebrate his victory, for the Duke was popular there, but riots resulted from the differences of party opinion. Monmouth no doubt was pleased when a child was brought to him to be touched for the king's evil.

Wallasey was a favourite sporting centre long before this time; Webb tells of the "fair sands, or plains, upon the shore of the sea, which, for the fitness for such a purpose, allure the gentlemen and others" ("others" went to race meetings even then) "oft to appoint great matches, and venture no small sums in trying the swiftness of their horses." Leasowe Castle, now a boarding-house hotel, was originally a racing box, built by the fifth Earl of Derby somewhere about 1593; it has since been called the New Hall and Mockbeggar Hall. There is a mystery about this Earl; he was nearest kinsman, save for Queen Elizabeth, to the dead King Henry, and certain conspirators sounded him regarding a possible rising. Lord Derby treated them very abruptly, for he was loyal to the backbone, and shortly afterwards he died suddenly. It was whispered that these rebels, fearing for their own necks, thought it wisest to put him out of harm's way. The Manor passed to the Egertons of Oulton, and during the Civil War fell into ruins; then it was that it earned the name of Mockbeggar Hall. In Collins' *Pilot*, published in 1690, we find the first mention of the Mockbeggar Wharf, the name still given to the foreshore.

Sir Edward Cust, who owned the Hall subsequently, added greatly to it; one of the rooms he panelled with woodwork from the famous Star Chamber of Westminster, and another with bog-oak from the Leasowe shore.

The Wallasey Marshes, which lie behind the Embankment —a fine engineering work and a pleasant promenade—are not uninteresting. It seems not unlikely that at some remote period this flat land was the mouth of the Mersey, and that the shore to the north was continuous with the Lancashire coast, but I cannot here go into all the evidence which has been adduced. There are numerous ditches and inland lagoons on the low-lying fields; these ditches are full of a pretty little yellow button-like flower which has puzzled many botanists, for it is not a native of our islands. This plant, *Cotula coronopifolia*, was at one time cultivated in the gardens of the Castle, and by some means it was allowed to establish itself in the country without, where, finding the environment very much to its taste, it spread and multiplied exceedingly, forming an interesting and striking addition to the flora. Shrimps abound in many of the pools, even where the water is quite fresh; they too seem to benefit by a change of surroundings; probably their worst enemies cannot reach them in these diminutive lakes, cut off from all communication with the sea. This part of Wirral is specially preserved all the year round by the County Council as a sanctuary for birds; it perhaps is not the best district that could be found, but it is something to have a large tract of country where birds have perfect safety. In autumn these fields are resorted to by immense numbers of small waders when the mudflats and banks are covered by the tide; the wheeling, flashing flocks of dunlins and ringed plovers give life and beauty to the somewhat dreary flats.

Near the Docks Station I cross the end of Wallasey Pool, and leaving Wallasey on my left, ride through Liscard to New Brighton. The old tower of Wallasey Church, which was built in 1530, stands a little distance from the modern building; it was all that was saved in the disastrous fire in 1857. There is a record of Wallasey Church which states that "the auntient cottagers have order in seates accordinge to the

worthiness of there landlordes"; no explanation is given of the meaning of worthy, but it speaks for itself!

It is a curious place, this New Brighton, a lesser Blackpool, with its promenade pier and lofty tower. The fort which stands beside the lighthouse on a red rock is far more picturesque than effective; the Mersey defences are not impregnable, but a hostile fleet at the mercy of a few torpedo-boats would be in considerable difficulties if the buoys were removed from the intricate channels of Liverpool Bay. As a watering-place New Brighton is hardly a success; Lancashire trippers do bathe here, but one must walk far to get knee-deep. There is, however, much healthy paddling going on, both young and old gloating in the cool, though somewhat Liverpool-stained water. Donkey- and horse-riding is a great source of amusement, especially to spectators, and then there is all the attraction of the pier. There is a promenade, too, other than the pier; "Ham and Egg Terrace" is its name. Coy maidens lure the pleasure-seeker to enter their gaudy saloons, where oysters, shrimps, aerated waters, and other luxuries may be partaken of, but at one and all the stock dish—the *bonne bouche*—is ham and eggs. Do not inquire where the eggs come from. There are other entertainments on the Terrace; you can have your photograph taken and printed while you wait, with appropriate comments thrown in during the operation anent your sweetheart, varied of course according to the sex of the victim. Then there are penny gaffs, menageries, peep-shows, performing dogs and boxing cats, ventriloquists, and all the other charms of the tripper's seaside resort.

The three-mile ride from New Brighton to Birkenhead is of a decidedly urban nature, becoming almost metropolitan when the Great Float is behind me. Woodside Stage, the most important of the Birkenhead ferries, is a busy scene; the Mersey tunnel does not seem to have lessened the bustle. Skilfully handled, crowded ferry-boats hurry backwards and forwards across the river, dodging each other and the shipping

like London 'busses at the Bank. Watch them come rushing towards the stage as if they wished to sink it, and watch how at a touch of the telegraph the boat answers to the watchful eye and guiding hand of the captain and swings up alongside without the slightest bump; with screws fore and aft, they are more in the hands of the captain and engineer than the steersman. The "thousand masts" of Mersey are a strange contrast to the forsaken Dee; Birkenhead, as part of Greater Liverpool, is the hub of one of the world's commercial wheels.

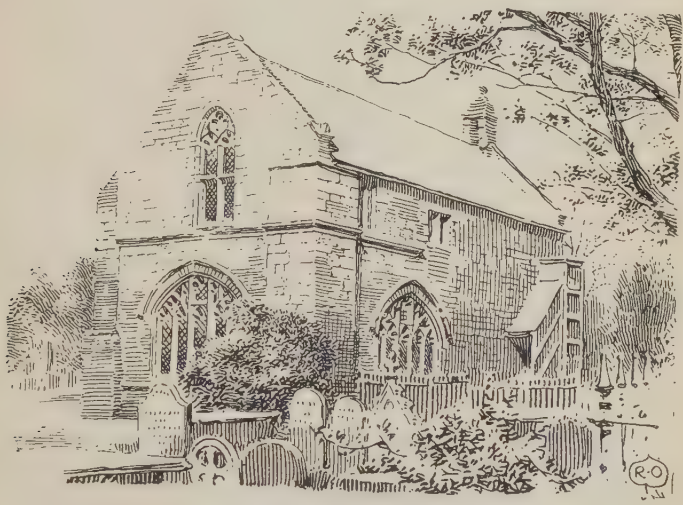
A hundred years ago there were only sixteen houses in Birkenhead, but by the middle of the last century, when the Great Float, the largest of the docks, was completed, there were over two thousand, and the town was still rapidly growing. It has been called, not without reason, "Liverpool's Bedroom."

Shipbuilding is the industry of Birkenhead, and top of the tree is the firm of Laird's; from their yard, in 1829, emerged the first iron boat built in England. In the sixties, when a bitter cry for cotton came from every town in Lancashire, Liverpool and Birkenhead merchants made rapid but risky fortunes by blockade-running. Then it was that a boat steamed out of Birkenhead, built in Laird's yard, which was supposed to have been built to run the blockade; it was many years before England was clear of the danger of war with America owing to the damage done by this pseudo-blockade-runner, really privateer, the *Alabama*.

The remains of the Benedictine monastery of Birkenhead stand stranded between the busy streets and the busier river hard by the Monk's Ferry. Somewhere about 1150 Hamo de Masci of Dunham founded the Priory, which for many years was used as an hostelry, where travellers detained by stress of weather could stay till the monks ferried them across to Liverpool. A very mythical story tells that when the monastic houses were dissolved the monks fled with all their treasure down an underground passage, but a portion of the roof falling in, they and the treasure were buried for ever. Their

remains have never been unearthed, probably because they were never there.

The monastic house that stood close to the Priory became Birkenhead Hall, and in the seventeenth century belonged to the Powell family; when it was decided to purchase the ruins of the Priory for the Corporation, a descendant of the family headed the subscription list. The Hall has gone; I wonder



Birkenhead Priory.

what has become of its ghost? Sir Thomas Powell, last of that name to own the Priory, offended his wife by paying too much attention to her maid; so my lady, while her maid was dressing her, suddenly pushed the damsel over the banisters and then fled to a foreign convent. Sir Thomas buried the murdered girl at his estate in Wales, and died a lonely, embittered man; but the maid's spirit could not rest, but returned to the staircase and haunted the scene of the tragedy.

It is a pity to take from Birkenhead its ghost, but the whole story is denied by one who ought to know—the originator of the fiction.

"The village of Oxton," says Ormerod, "is mean and small, composed of wretched straggling huts, amongst roads only not impassable. The township occupies an eminence which commands a full view of the buildings and shipping of Liverpool, exhibiting a picture resembling metropolitan bustle and splendour, almost immediately below the eye; but no degree of civilisation or improvement has reached this part of the opposite shore, which is a scene of solitude, broken in upon only by the voice of the cowherd or the cry of the plover. Bleak and barren moors stretch round it in every direction, and exhibit an unmixed scene of poverty and desolation." All this is changed now; fine streets lead up the hill from Birkenhead to Oxton, and the higher we rise the more we leave the town behind and the more residential the district becomes, till on the eminence, where there is a splendid view of Birkenhead, the river, and Liverpool, we have a most desirable suburb of good houses built in a fine healthy neighbourhood. That part of the river immediately below is the "Sloyne," where the Atlantic greyhounds rest at anchor, and a Liverpool man will point out each liner by its build or funnel pattern. Tranmere, the home of those indefatigable collectors of historical matter connected with Cheshire, the four Randle Holmes, is at the foot of the hill. The first Randle cared so little about honours that he paid a fine of £10 rather than be knighted at the coronation of Charles I., yet he served his county as Sheriff and Mayor of Chester. The third Holme wrote *The Academie of Armory*, which he wisely says "is to be understood by few"; it contains all sorts of matter, including "the proper mode of blazoning God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, cherubim and seraphim, Heathen gods and goddesses, demi-gods and country gods, holy orders of angels, and the infernal order of devils, and all live animals in which

there is either life or motion." It also treats of and gives a coat of arms for almost every subject under the sun, comprising such diverse things as cock-fighting, punishment in hell, palmistry, grammar, billiards, and dreams. The manuscripts, however, collected by these four Cheshire men, and their investigation of ancient monuments, are of the greatest value.

A little higher up the river is Rock Ferry, where Nathaniel Hawthorne lived when he came to Liverpool, and beyond that again is New Ferry. Mrs. Gamlin relates an amusing story of this ferry: part of it collapsed during a heavy gale, and some time later a large mass of timber was found floating in the Irish Sea, bearing the admonition that "No vessels must anchor here." A mile or two inland from Oxton is Woodchurch, with its picturesque church tower strengthened by massive buttresses.

The road that runs south along the ridge from Oxton is a very pleasant one; it leads to Storeton, where amongst the fir-woods are the famous quarries for building stone which are renowned amongst geologists for the frequent traces revealed upon the flags of the former inhabitants of Wirral. That great creature, Cheirotherium, hopped about the ancient beaches which hardened into the rock of the Keuper sandstone, and in the soft tidal sand left its footmarks, and the casts rather than the indentations of the extinct batrachian's perambulations are constantly met with, along with ripple-marks, when the stones are split. Good examples of these hand-like marks may be seen in any of the neighbouring museums, and in out-of-the-way places, as in an entry in Bowdon, weathered flags bearing these footprints in the sands of time have taught many an early lesson in geology to wondering children.

The deep gorges, the ancient furze and bramble-grown excavations, and the worn deserted rails show the antiquity of these Storeton quarries: not that they are deserted, for excellent stone is still obtained; but in places far remote from the

Woodchurch.

present quarries there are huge hollows cut out many many years ago and long unworked. Storeton Hall lies a little to the right, standing on a hill which is separated from the quarried ridge. It was an important place in forest days, and traces may be seen to-day of the pack-tracks and roughly paved lanes which radiated from the home of the Sylvesters, foresters of Wirral. Then came the Stanleys from Stoneleigh

Storeton Hall.

and settled in the district, and at the close of the fourteenth century William de Stanley built Storeton Hall; the great Cheshire family of Stanleys descended from the Storeton settlers.

Only a fragment of Sir William's house remains, but this fragment has worried many an antiquarian. Attached to the farm buildings of the present Hall is a high wall containing an ancient doorway and a large pointed window. Looking at it

from the farmyard we only see the inside of one of the great hall windows, for the rest of this room is destroyed and the cowshed beyond is built against the exterior of the old house.

Storeton has its story of an elopement quite as romantic as the famous tale of Haddon or the legend of Lochinvar: through this clandestine marriage the Stanleys obtained the master-forestship of Wirral and the large estates and revenues which went with the office. John de Stanley, some six hundred and twenty years ago, was entertaining at a feast Sir Philip de Bamville and his family. Joan, Sir Philip's eighteen-year-old daughter, had no liking for the marriage that her father had arranged for her with his stepson, so while the festivities were at their height she quietly slipped away. Young William Stanley was waiting with steeds ready saddled; into the saddle she sprang, and away down the rough Wirral tracks, over the Gowy marshes, across the great Cheshire plain, the two young lovers spurred to Astbury. In that ancient church, William declared—we have the actual words sworn to by trustworthy witnesses—"Joan, I plight thee my troth to take and hold thee as my lawful wife unto my life's end," and the happy girl replied, "I, Joan, take thee, William, as my lawful husband." No doubt the knight was wroth, and no doubt he blamed John Stanley and his heady beer for hoodwinking him, but the marriage was legal, and the Stanleys were powerful, so things turned out all right in the end.

There is a quieter little village still, not far from Storeton; into the very centre of Wirral I drop from the hills, to Brimstage or Brunstath, for at the Hall there exists a portion of an ancient building, perhaps used as a peel tower. Sir Hugh de Hulse, it is asserted, built this tower—a portion of his castle—in 1398; it is a strong-looking keep or peel, the vaulted lower story of which was the chapel. Little is known of its history; perhaps it was too strong for marauders to attack.

There is a spired church at Higher Bebington, just below

Brimstage.

the Storeton ridge, but it has little of antiquarian interest. One monument which it possesses is older than any other church decoration that I know of, for in the porch, just above the door, is a triangular stone from the quarries hard by, adorned with three or four footmarks of that ancient inhabitant of the district, the amphibious Cheirotherium. Lower Bebington Church is one of the most interesting in Wirral. When Hawthorne saw this old church he was particularly struck with its appearance. "The steeple has ivy on it," he says, "and looks old, old, old; so does the whole church, though portions of it have been renewed, but not so as to impair the aspect of heavy substantial endurance, and long, long decay, which may go on hundreds of years longer before the church is a ruin. . . . Close to the wall of the church, beside the door, there was an ancient baptismal font of stone. In fact, it was a pile of roughly-hewn stone steps, five or six feet high, with a block of stone at the summit, in which was a hollow about as big as a wash-bowl. It was full of rain water." So it is now; but I do not feel sure that it is a font and not the remains of a village cross.

Within, the church is most interesting; some of the pillars of the south aisle are late Norman, excellently preserved; the others are late Perpendicular, and the work of restoration seems to have ended quite suddenly. Was it lack of funds or changes in the religious feeling of the times which caused this cessation of the work? In the choir stalls are quaint miserere s; one, a pelican feeding its young, is both interesting and amusing. Five shillings a year was the rent of a cow in Bebington, for under a useful benefaction the poor parishioners were supplied with a cow at this moderate charge; it was, however, stipulated that the animal should be returned at the end of the year in good repair.

Leaving the church, with its "old, old, old" broached spire, I see across the railway some red-tiled, magpie buildings. How often we who love the country find rural beauties

destroyed by manufactories, land bare and barren, sky dulled by smoke; worse still is it when we come across those dirty herded streets where cheap but insanitary cottages are thrown together anyhow for the dwellings of "hands." The soap trade is often responsible for the greatest accumulation of dirt, for the most unpleasant odours. Is this filth and squalor necessary? Look at yonder village, clean and neat; look at those roads lined with young elms and chestnuts, at the half-timbered Cheshire cottages each with its garden plot, at the stone bridge, the little church, the fine halls and the immense works. This is indeed one of the despised soap-works with its own model village round it.

Twenty years ago between the Bebington road and the river was all grazing land and swamp—mostly the latter, when Lever Brothers chose the spot for their manufactory of Sunlight Soap. They did not build the place with that selfish greed that raises so many an eyesore in the country, but in all things considered the welfare of those who were to be employed; they built Port Sunlight with a generous hand, erecting some six hundred sanitary and tasteful houses for their three thousand odd employees; they gave them a good temperance inn, and later dining halls for men and women, the first of which Gladstone opened in 1891. Port Sunlight is a lasting honour to the men who own it and built it; it is said to be the biggest soap-works in the country, and it deserves to be the most prosperous.

St. Patrick sailed up the Mersey and landed in the little creek now called Bromborough Pool, baptising, so it is said, at the well which retains his name. This well is famous for its petrifying properties, but it is not recorded if this has anything to do with St. Patrick's visit.

Bromborough, the next village I enter after leaving Bebington, claims to be the site of the battle of Brunanburgh, when, in 937, Æthelstan and Edmund Ætheling, with their West Saxon and Mercian troops, destroyed the power of the

invading Danes, who had landed 30,000 soldiers, Danes, Norwegians, Irish, and Scotch, to subdue the country. The point of landing of the 615 ships, and the site of the battle, are matters of dispute amongst historians; some place the battle on the shores of the Humber. There is, however, fairly conclusive evidence that a great battle was fought about this time in Wirral, and Bromborough is as likely a spot as any.

The Court House, by the side of Bromborough Pool, an arm of the Mersey, was built by the Hardwares towards the end of the seventeenth century. The family were strong supporters of Nonconformity—Matthew Henry married a daughter of the house—and Harrison, the ejected Puritan divine, preached at the Court when he left Chester. The Hall, another old house, was built by Bishop Bridgman, we learn from an article in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1762. In the same article there is a quaint description of the petrifying well and of a creature of zoological interest. "A kind of reptile, called by the inhabitants 'long worms,' is very common here in the sandy lanes and hedges, and a poor girl, who lived here, once fed one of them, which became so tame as to creep round her arm and receive its food from her without injuring her." The blindworm is not quite extinct in Wirral; if this is the creature meant it is not surprising that it did not injure the poor girl.

Away on the left is Eastham Ferry, close to where the Manchester Ship Canal enters the tidal Mersey, for the canal winds round the southern shore of the wide river, thus avoiding the many difficult channels amongst the shifting sandbanks. A little farther on is the old village of Eastham, with an octagonal broached spire nearly as ancient-looking as Bebington. Hawthorne said that Eastham was "the finest old English village" which he had come across, but I do not think that it compares with many of the older villages of the plain. The poor old yew in the churchyard looks rather sickly; like so many of these churchyard yews its days are numbered; this one, according to the local ideas, is over a thousand years old!

The road to the left leads away from the direct Chester road towards Hooton, where we pass the great house which was built in 1778, and belonged to the Earls of Derby. Hooton Park Club is well known in Liverpool; the Hall is now the club-house and hotel; horse-racing, polo, croquet,

Eastham.

tennis, and all kinds of sports take place in the extensive park, which covers some three hundred acres.

Staunch Catholics were the Stanleys of Hooton, yet when Spain was threatening us with its Armada, Rowland Stanley was amongst the largest subscribers to the defence fund. He was more loyal than his son William. Sir William was a

soldier of fortune, always in the thick of the fight, especially when there were pickings; four to one were the Irish rebels he defeated in Munster, when his gallant band held them at bay for eight hours. When governor of Deventer under Leicester, he treated the burgomasters with scant civility. "Now fetch me the keys of the gate and deliver me them straight, and you shall all die," he commanded the trembling city fathers. Babington's conspiracy to place Mary Queen of Scots on the throne found favour in his sight; he urged many of his lawless troops to take service under the flag of Spain, and finally sank so low as to point out vulnerable spots in our defences for the attacks of the Armada.

The Hooton family is no more. Sir William Massey Stanley ruined the estate by his extravagance. When he was obliged to [sell his property to pay his debts, Napoleon III., who had often been his guest, generously helped him to meet his creditors.

A rather rough and uneven lane leaves the road just beyond the racing stables and runs towards the river; this is the way to Poole. There were Pooles by the Mersey side when Edward I. was king, and Pooles lived here till but a few years ago. Probably Sir William Poole, Sheriff of Chester under Henry VIII., built a part of the present Hall, but some of it dates some forty years later; there is a stone in the garden which stood above one of the fireplaces and now is hidden beneath rockery plants bearing the date 1570 and the initials which, so far as I can decipher, are I. P. and K. P. Poole is perhaps the finest of the old Wirral halls; a tall octagonal turret stands at either end of the east front, and a great embattled porch rises above the front doorway. The stone portions, old though they are, are young compared with the overhanging timbered gable at the back; probably at one time the whole was timbered. Mr. Jones and his obliging son show me the objects of interest, including a grand panelled room and a now fastened up underground passage, which tradition affirms was

connected with the similar passage at Stanlow Point. It would be a long subterranean walk for the monks of Stanlow or the devout Catholics of Poole if this passage ever existed.

The old clock on the front does not mark time now; its

Poole Hall.

massive weights are decorations of the rockery. These weights formerly dropped down an enclosed wooden shaft outside the walls, but a recent storm brought wood and all to the ground.

Very grey and weathered are the ancient walls of Poole, rather uncertain the perpendiculars of those strange turrets.

The place has seen many years, and doubtless many vicissitudes, for the Pooles, like the Stanleys, suffered persecution under kind, good Queen Bess.

A great mound stands as a background to Poole; this is Mount Manisty, said to be the largest hill raised by human hands, for it is a spoil bank from the Ship Canal. Whether the largest artificial mound or not, it is a great size, and makes one realise the size of the undertaking. Close to this point the canal is 120 feet wide, and the embankment that separates it from the river is 140 feet across its base and half that width at the top.

There is no public road direct from Poole to Ellesmere Port, but I am directed along a private way, so that in a few minutes I arrive in the busy town which surrounds the docks at the end of that very Cheshire canal, the Shropshire Union. Fifty coasters and fifty flats can load and unload in the Ship Canal opposite that great grain elevator, which is almost as prominent an object as Mount Manisty. Ellesmere Port is interesting, but not very beautiful, and I pass on to Whitby. About a mile from the road is the site of one of the granges of Stanlow; the terraced moat of Grange Cow Worth being still to be seen, though the ruins and pavement which the plough revealed many years ago have been removed.

Little Stanney, just beyond Whitby, was the home of the Bunburys; they lived in the moated Hall and in the house at the far end of the street which goes by the name of Rake Hall. It is said that the uproarious convivial meetings of the younger members of the family gave the place this unenviable name, but it is worth considering that there is another Rake Hall in Bromborough and a Rake Lane in Eastham.

It is not far to Chester through Stoke and Upton. On the way I pass through Wervin, where there was an ancient chapel, which has long been converted or perverted into a cow-shed. Butter Hill, which is hardly an eminence and lies on the right,

was supposed to have been named during one of the Chester plagues. The Wirral farmers brought their provisions here and left them for the plague-infected inhabitants to call for. Beyond Upton I am practically once more in Chester, and enter again by the Northgate, through which I left the city.

CHAPTER XII

THE WESTERN LIMITS OF CHESHIRE

For the third and last time I leave Chester, crossing the river by the Grosvenor Bridge, and turning down Lache Lane towards the western limits of the county. All the land on the right was, within the memory of old men, wild marshes, and at one time it was part of the tidal estuary. An old farmstead, some little distance down the lane, was formerly known as the Decoy Farm, though the name is now only preserved in official documents. It seems more than probable that this farm stands near the site of "my coy," which Sir William Brereton speaks about when describing his travels in Holland, locating it as near "Doddleston Bridge." Balderton Bridge, one of the old bridges, is but a mile from Dodleston, and lies close to the farm. Of the decoy itself there is now no trace, unless a fair-sized reedy pond is the remnant of the former lure. The fields are so extensively drained that it is impossible to say what the size or shape of the pond formerly was, but two long curved depressions which taper and curve away from the pond may perhaps be the traces of the original pipes. The present occupant of the farm never remembers the pond being different from its present shape, but, she tells me, ducks come in plenty to these fields when they are flooded, which constantly happens after heavy rain.

In all the fields on either side of the road there are here, as

indeed in all parts of Cheshire, numerous small ponds, locally called "pits." These ponds now serve to water the cattle, but from the title, pit, we should gather that they were originally excavations; and so they were, for the Cheshire marl-pits were dug before the days of artificial manure to provide marl to lay upon and fertilise the fields. Marling is now obsolete, but at one time gangs of labourers were employed in going from farm to farm to dig the clay to spread upon the land. Each of these gangs had its captain, and it was customary for largesse to be claimed from the squire, farmer, or indeed any passer-by, when a pit was being dug. If the visitor provided a sixpence, or a smaller coin, the captain or "lord" of the little band gave a signal, when at once spade and pick were thrown down. Joining hands, the clay-soiled workers, with a semi-savage dance, chanted some weird song to the effect that they had received part of a hundred pounds, but if the sum exceeded sixpence it was part of a thousand pounds, and the dance and complimentary yells were more emphatic. In the local public house, over much beer, the merits of the donors were retold that night, similar songs and dances being indulged in. Marling is no more, but the pits remain; Cheshire, from the nature of its fertile Triassic marl, will never suffer long from drought, for every field, with very few exceptions, possesses one or more well-filled marl-pit.

Owen Gwynedd, nearly eight hundred years ago, led his invading Welshmen so far as Balderton Bridge, but they got no further. To-day this tiny arch crosses a straight-cut drain and it is not easy to understand how that could form any impediment to an attacking army; we must, however, remember that all this country was marshland, and probably the bridge was on the single track that crossed the waste. At any rate the men of Chester held the bridge, and the Welsh, leaving heaps of dead and wounded behind them, were driven back to yonder hills. All this country west of Chester was for centuries a battlefield between the Cestrians and the Welsh;

often the raiding bands were stopped by the line of fortresses, but often too they drove the defenders behind their earthworks and passed on to the walls of the city, sometimes even entering and looting the rows and markets.

A little stream forms the boundary between England and Wales, and part of Kinnerton village lies on one side, part on

Kinnerton Hall.

the other. Kinnerton Hall is the most western house in Cheshire, with the exception of the great peninsula of Wirral. It is a very suitable limit to our road; two tall, ornamented gables with a smaller one between them look out westward across the old walled garden into Wales—look out towards those great rough, heather-clad hills which divide the Clwyd Valley from the Dee, from the rounded tops of Moel Arthur and Moel

Fammau to Cyrn-y-Brain, and the imposing finish of Cefn Fedw, overlooking Valle Crucis Abbey and the beautiful Dee-side town of Llangollen. It is said that a former owner of this fine old Hall used to boast that his farmlands were in three counties — Cheshire, Denbigh, and Flint, but the Denbigh border is some miles to the south.

Returning to Gorstella, I take the road south for Dodleston, where, at the Hall which has long vanished, Sir William Brereton made his headquarters during the memorable siege of Chester. Close to the church, where lies the body of Sir Thomas Egerton the famous Baron Ellesmere, founder of one branch of the influential family, is a fine moated mound, now the vicarage orchard, where the Boydells had their castle. Nothing is left but the mound and the stagnant, weed-grown moat, but we can conjure up pictures of many an anxious night and lively day when Sassenach and Cymri fought round this spot with all the fury of neighbours of different race.

At Pulford, another border village, there were not many years ago traces of the old fortifications, but I cannot find them; here begins Eaton Park, and for miles I ride along level gravel drives, between fine woods and through beautiful park-lands. There was an abbey at Poulton, a little village within the park—the site of an ancient chapel is between the village and the river—of which there is little recorded, for its life, at any rate in this part of the country, was short. Robert Picerna, butler of Randle Gernons, Earl of Chester, gave part of the manor to the abbot of Combermere, and according to the *Monasticon*, a convent for Cistercians was founded here in 1153. Welsh robbers kept the monks busy, reducing their stock of cattle and mowing down their corn, so some seventy years later they induced Randle Blundeville to translate them to the better-protected and more peaceful Dieulacres in Staffordshire.

Earl Randle was dying. A certain hermit, looking out from the door of his cell, perceived a procession of apparently

human beings led by a chieftain; he accosted them and asked their errand. "We are demons," replied the leader, "on our way to bear testimony to the sins of Earl Randle." Now the hermit may have had a grudge against the Earl, for he does not seem to have attempted to dissuade the evil spirits from their purpose but only conjured them to let him know the latest news on their return. In due time they came back and a strange tale they disclosed. It seemed the sick Earl had died and his sins had found him out, for his unhappy soul was delivered over to the lord of evil; no sooner, however, had he entered the infernal regions than the big-mouthed mastiffs of Dieulacre set up such a baying that the devils became alarmed, and when the dogs of other monasteries far and wide took up the warning din, the devil was only too glad to let the Earl's soul go free, for, he said, no greater enemy of his had ever entered hell; thousands of souls had been released from punishment by the prayers which had been offered up by the monks for Randle and other sinners.

Now I am entering Eaton Park, the seat of the Duke of Westminster. Eaton Hall, though very modern compared with many of the buildings I have visited, is a grand place; I can only describe it by saying that it is the most magnificent seat in Cheshire; in front of the Hall is Watt's equestrian statue of Hugh Lupus, the great originator of the Earldom, while a noble avenue, a mile and a half in length, stretches away to the Belgrave Lodge. Gilbert de Grosvenour was a nephew of Hugh.

The Grosvenors of Allostock and Eaton were the great hunters of the Earls of Chester—so it is said the name originated; they claimed the sergeancy of the Dee from Eaton Weir to Arnoldsheyre, the rock, now called the Earl's Eye, opposite the Castle. They had the right of the ferry tolls, of the forfeiture of all illegal nets, and of a moiety of all fish captured in that part of the river within their jurisdiction; they also annexed all "waifs and wrecks" on the manor.

Would you know more of him, you must look at The Roll,
Which records the dispute, And the subsequent suit,
Commenced in "Thirteen sev'nty five,"—which took root
In Le Grosvenor's assuming the arms Le Scroope swore
That none but *his* ancestors, ever before,
In foray, joust, battle, or tournament wore,
To wit, "On a Prussian-blue Field, a Bend Or";
While the Grosvenor averr'd that his ancestor bore
The same, and Scroope lied like a—somebody tore
Off the simile,—so I can tell you no more,
Till some A double S shall the fragment restore.

The author of the immortal *Ingoldsby Legends* is not quite correct about his date; it was some ten years later. The Scroope *v.* Grosvenor quarrel lasted three years and created a great deal of interest, and provided, no doubt, considerable pickings for the lawyers on either side. Scroope's witnesses declared that the Grosvenors were nobodies and so had no right to wear coats of arms at all; Lord Grey stated that all he knew of the family was that he had bought a black mare from "one Emma Grosvenor"; yet the Abbot of Vale Royal affirmed that this identical coat appeared as the seal of the Grosvenors upon very ancient deeds, it was in fact the one that their ancestor wore at the battle of Hastings. All the clergy, knights, and ladies of Lancashire and Cheshire appeared as witnesses, and most of them spoke for the Grosvenors; for Sir Richard le Scroope there were, amongst many more, the Duke of York, the King of Castile, the Duke of Lancaster, and the Earls of Derby and Arundel, and not least important the poet Chaucer.

It was proved that both parties had worn the disputed arms for centuries, but Scroope won his case, and the Marshal allowed Sir Robert le Grosvenor to carry the same arms if he would insert a particular border. Not he! He would have all or nothing; so he chose a golden wheatsheaf upon the azure field instead of the obnoxious Bend d'Or. A little over twenty years ago this storm in a tea-cup was brought to our

minds, and this time the Grosvenor's Bend d'Or was victorious; a race-horse of that name, the property of the late Duke, won the Derby with flying colours.

Eaton with its stately Hall, its well-timbered deer-park, its serpentine, its marshy duckwood, its racing stables with the paddocks in which are some of the finest examples of blood horses to be seen anywhere, is altogether a delightful place. On Saturdays and holidays riverside Eaton is a gay sight; somewhat below the Hall, by the village with the church where the Grosvenors are buried, is Eccleston Ferry—"Jimmy th' Boats," the boating men call it—and opposite the Hall is the Iron Bridge. At both these places tea may be obtained; they are the rendezvous of all the ravenous pleasure-seekers; flannelled men and gaily dressed women feed, on fine days, in hundreds in the open, while swarms of wasps assist them to finish the marmalade and jam.

Not being at present at any rate—a boating man, I cross the bridge, glancing down at the little quay with its rows of moored pleasure-boats, and make my way to the quiet village of Aldford, with its old grey church, near the site of the castle which in the days of Henry II., and later, guarded the ford of the Dee. Aldford was a safer keep than those on the other side, for the Dee waters, even though fordable, were a considerable addition to the defences. Aldford has a strange history.

When Sir William Stanley was executed by his patron Henry VII. this was part of the extensive Stanley property that passed into the greedy hands of the Crown. Sir William Brereton, son of Randle Brereton of Shocklach, purchased the property next, and then he in turn incurred his royal master's displeasure through a real or pretended intrigue with the unfortunate queen Anne Boleyn. Poor Brereton lost the estates and his head, and Henry VIII. became lord of Aldford like his father before him. Henry next sold or granted them to two of his favourites; but in the

reign of Philip and Mary we find them once more in the hands of the Crown, for both grantees were dead—this time, so far as we know, having died natural deaths. Mary sold them to Sir Edward Fitton, so that they became part of the Fitton property which for many years was struggled for by the real and pretended heirs of Sir Edward. At the end of that long and tedious lawsuit we find them in the portion that passed to Lord Mohun, and at last they found an abiding master when they were purchased by Sir Richard Grosvenor of Eaton.

Aldford Hall, half a mile south of the village, has lost its beauty, but not so Churton, a small two-gabled black and white farm which stands a few yards to the left of the Farndon Road; I think there is a more modern house or hall further on in the village, but I do not stop but hurry on towards Farndon.

Before the houses of Farndon begin to line the road I pass a tall stone obelisk with couchant lions guarding its foot. This is the Barnston Monument, placed here in memory of Roger Barnston of Crewe Hill, whose deeds in the Crimea were perhaps even outshone by his valour in the great Mutiny; at Lucknow he was unfortunately wounded and he died at Cawnpore. Other records of his deeds are placed in the Barnston Chapel at Farndon. This Church of St. Chad is an ancient building, perhaps some portions of it date back to the days of Sir Patrick de Bartun, a knight of King Edward III., whose much shattered effigy lies in the nave. During his lifetime, too, it is said that Farndon Bridge was built, but little of the original structure can now remain, though the nine arches with their pointed buttresses and cut-waters were probably similar in the fourteenth-century bridge; the gate-house, which guarded the Welsh end, is gone. In the Barnston Chapel there is some Royalist stained glass well worthy of note. Rather more than thirty years ago it was removed, but Harry Barnston, Esq., replaced it in the church in 1894. Several small squares—one or two, alas! are missing—contain

portraits of the Royalist leaders who took part in the siege of Chester; Richard Grosvenor, Sir William Mainwaring, William Barnston, Sir Francis Gamul of Buerton are amongst those which can be recognised. In the centre are weapons and camp equipment, and below are pikemen, musicians, and others, showing the military costumes of the time. It is but a small window, but it is intensely interesting.

"You must go to Holt to see Farn races," is the Cheshire

Farndon.

way of expressing the close connection between the Deeside village and the Welsh town; Farndon races, which certainly date back to early in the seventeenth century, were very famous; the racecourse claims to be one of the oldest in the country. Leaving the embattled sandstone tower of the fine old church, I drop down to "an exceeding fair stone bridge" and am somewhat astonished to see the river flowing in the wrong direction; I had not realised that spring tides topping

the weir at Chester are felt here and even higher. The story of this ancient bridge is one of tragedy; often the marauding Welsh crossed to Farndon, often the Cheshire raiders retaliated; many a fierce fight took place at the gate-house between the factions of the towns, for though such near neighbours the men of Farndon and Holt were frequently at loggerheads. The saddest story of all, however, reminds one of the poor little children whom their wicked uncle desired out of the way, the Babes in the Wood. Prince

Farndon Bridge.

Madoc died and left two infant sons heir to his property; the Earl of Warren and Roger Mortimer were appointed guardians over the two lads, whose ages were but ten and eight. The guardians, thinking that if the children died the inheritance would be theirs, one dark night led the two lads to Farndon Bridge and dropped their tiny bodies over the parapet into the black river. Not many years ago there were people in the district who would tell that on wild, dark nights they had seen two fairy forms clad in white haunting the arches and

stone buttresses of the ancient bridge, and that on the wind was borne the last despairing scream of the dying children; in these country towns the supernatural lingers long after the actual tragic facts are forgotten.

Farndon does not look a likely spot to produce great men, yet John Speed deserves a place in history better than many whose birthplaces are made much of; we do not use his *Theatre of the Empire* or his *History* now, but in the sixteenth century they were far in advance of anything that had been written of the kind. Young Speed began life as a country tailor until, thanks to the discernment and patronage of Sir Fulke Greville, he was able to devote his talent to more worthy objects.

The cultivated land to the east of Farndon was the third of the Cheshire sanctuaries—the others were at Hoole and Rudheath. King's Marsh was a wild, desolate district surrounded by a ditch to mark the limit of safety for fugitives and "foreigners," for any who had sought the protection of the Earl or who were acting as mercenaries against his enemies might reside here in safety for a year and day provided they used no nails or pins in the erection of their squatter's tent.

Crewe Hill, the seat of the Barnstons', overlooks the river on the right, and the Hall, a square, brick farm with two tall bays, faces the road. The next village, if village it can be called, is Caldecott Green, a name which recalls to mind the famous children's artist—Randolph Caldecott. There were Caldecotes of Caldecote in Plantagenet days, and at the close of the seventeenth century a certain learned doctor of divinity, Randolph Caldecott of Chester, was very proud of his Cestrian stock. The artist's ancestors came from this district, and though he was hardly a Cheshire man it is interesting to know that many of his sketches for the backgrounds of his famous and amusing pictures were made within the county.

This portion of the county is wonderfully remote, indeed it

is almost out of the world; somewhere close to Caldecott a strange clapping sound catches my ear, and looking across a field I behold what I do not remember seeing elsewhere in Cheshire—a lad walking up and down shouting to scare birds from the crops and using one of the now almost obsolete wooden clappers.

A certain Jew, we learn from Giraldus, was travelling with the Archdeacon of Shrewsbury, whose name was Peche, and the Dean who was called Devil. From these dignitaries he learnt that the deaconry extended from Ill-street to Malpas; he pleasantly told them that "He found it would be a miracle if ever he got safe out of this country," for Sin was the Archdeacon, the Devil the Dean, the entry into the district was Ill and the going forth again Mal pas. At the northern extremity of this bad pass, bad, for it was the easy pass—if pass it can be called — for the marauding Welsh into the county, stood Shocklach Castle; southward Oldcastle guarded the entrance, and in the centre was the fortress of Malpas itself. Where have they gone, these three castles that marked the southern gateway to the fat lands of Cheshire? Quite at the northern limit of Shocklach township stands a mound or hillock at the head of a deep ravine that falls away towards the river; here is preserved the name Castle Mound, while the few cottages to the left of the road are called Castle-town. Castle and keep, all the masonry has vanished, perhaps used to build farms and cottages, barns and pigsties, but the mound remains where the sentry stood and looked out into the night towards the gleaming river. There were no blockhouses and search-lights then, no barbed-wire fences; the watcher's eyes had to be keen and sharp and his ears ever alert to catch the sound of hurrying feet when the frightened hind ran in to say that the fierce raiders had crossed the border. Even so late as the sixteenth century we find that Lord Dudley claimed the right to keep Shocklach fortified, and now naught but this mound remains.

There was a Saxon lord named Dot; there are Dods holding land in the district still; the name is one of the oldest in the county. Would we know aught of John Dod, the "Decalogist," born at Shocklach in 1547, we must turn to that biographer of England's worthies, Thomas Fuller. "In him the old Puritan seemed to expire and in his grave to be interred. Humble, meek, patient, charitable, as in his censures of, so in his alms to others. Would I could truly say but half so much of the next generation." At Shocklach was a "fair and goodly seat" of the Brereton, long since demolished like Lord Dudley's castle. Humphrey Brereton of Shocklach, if we are to believe his own story about himself, was active in helping Lord Derby to arrange the ever memorable marriage that closed the struggle between the rival Roses. The Earl assured Lady Bessy of York—

> For I will bring no man with me
> But Humphrey Brereton, my true esquire.

When Humphrey arrived with an amorous and diplomatic message from the lady to Henry of Lancaster, the porter refused his offer of a bribe.

> I will none of thy gold, the porter said,
> Nor Humphrey none of thy fee,
> I will open thee the gate certaine
> To receive thee and the mules three;
> For a Cheshire man born am I certain,
> From the Malpas but miles three.

Working round by somewhat devious lanes to Horton Green, where there is a real village green and an old hall, now a farm, still guarded by its fine stone gateway, I pass right below the frowning bluff of Overton Scar. In amongst the firs and larches, hidden from sight, is a great cavern cut in the red sandstone where once resided a band of gipsies, troublesome neighbours of the lords of the soil. So troublesome indeed did these poaching troglodytes become that the

landowners raised forces and evicted them, dismantling and closing the rocky fortress in spite of the terror of bitter Zingari curses. One wonders that any descendants of the evictors remain, for the Egyptian curse is a long and lasting one, passing, if we are to believe current fiction, from generation to generation.

The old moated Hall of Edge stands in its park away to the north of the Scar. Hova Dot, descendant of the great Saxon landowner, settled here in the days of King Henry II. —doubtless his ancestors had been evicted like the gipsies by the Norman usurpers; he was founder of the Dod family, and though the direct male line failed, the Wolley-Dods live at Edge Hall to-day.

In that collection of dread doings and just reward, Burghall's *Providence Improved* we find mention of Edge for a servant of Mr. Dod's, after the excitement of a bear-bait, stopped drinking at the village public house until it was too dark to see, or his irresponsible legs led him astray; he wandered into a ditch and was drowned. The good old vicar leaves us to draw our own moral.

Very quaint and charming is the little market town of Malpas, with its grand old embattled church perched right on the top of a hill, and its two streets lined with irregular ancient houses; it would be more in keeping with the place if the 'bus which runs to the station a mile and a half away were a stage coach. I put up my steed at the "Red Lion," a plain brick hostelry, but interesting, for this is the inn which has more than once entertained royalty.

The King—James I. it is said—came to Malpas and entered the tap-room of the "Red Lion," for even kings get thirsty, and there "supping their beer, sat Rector and Curate, enjoying good cheer." The king joined the church dignitaries, and the toasts went round. When it came to the rector's turn to stand treat he refused to pay for the curate, exclaiming:—"Higgledy piggledy Malpas shot! Let every tub stand

on its own bottom." "Nay, nay," replied the convivial monarch, well up in Cheshire sayings, "Maxfield measure, heap and thrutch." But the rector was stupid, so the King paid for the curate and himself and went his way, wroth with

Malpas.

the stingy parson. In a short time the rector found that his subordinate was no longer curate but had been appointed joint-rector. Such is the legend of the double living of Malpas, a curious state of things which continued until the growth of the parish warranted the erection of new churches.

The chair in which the King sat is shown at the "Red Lion," and when the late Empress of Austria was hunting in Cheshire and the hounds met at Malpas, the landlord brought it out for her use.

The tower of Malpas Church is square and massive, and the whole structure looks solid and lasting; inside the carved oak roof, ornamented with angels whose wings look rather dislocated, is very fine, and the two chapels are surrounded by oak screens. Randle Brereton of Malpas and Shocklach lies alongside his wife, daughter of old Peter Dutton of Hatton, in the Brereton Chapel; he was the father of that unfortunate Sir William who was accused of having intrigued with the ill-fated Anne Boleyn. Probably the charge was false, but the fickle monarch did not hesitate to sacrifice his faithful servant to trump up a charge against the wife he was tired of. In the Cholmondeley Chapel there are the figures of Sir Hugh Cholmondeley and his wife, and both monuments are well worth examining; they are excellent workmanship and seem to have escaped the wear of time and the malicious chipping of Roundhead soldiers and thoughtless visitors. The fourteenth-century piscina, the great oak chest decorated with chased ironwork which stands near the door, and the old oak stalls are memorials of the lasting work of the past.

Close to the fine old church is the Higher Rectory where one of the most noted of our colonial bishops was born. Reginald Heber, for ever famous as the author of that grand old missionary hymn "From Greenland's icy mountains," was by birth a Malpas man, though he did not follow his father as rector here. The late T. W. Barlow relates a story about the bishop which he rightly says "will bear repetition." Heber's celebrated prize poem, "Palestine," was read to Sir Walter Scott before it was recited at Oxford, and the great novelist remarked that no mention was made of the building of the temple without tools. "Upon this Heber

was silent, and buried in thought for a few moments, when he dashed off these exquisite lines :—

> No hammer fell, no ponderous axes rung ;
> Like some tall palm the mystic fabric sprung.
> Majestic silence !"

Quiet as Malpas is now, what must it have been like a hundred years ago when there was not a single turnpike road in any direction which led to the town? Even in the middle of the last century the weekly market was but thinly attended ; now first-rate roads lead to Whitchurch and Chester, and a better one still to the station where there is good communication by rail with these two towns.

Two old Cheshire families— the Breretons and the Drakes —owned parts of Malpas, and from here too sprang the Egertons and the Cholmondeleys, who both claim descent from Fitz-Hugh, Baron of Malpas. The baronial castle, the centre of the three defenders of the pass, has gone ; so also has the home of the Breretons which stood "at the end of the South Street."

Sir Francis Drake belonged to the Devonshire branch of the same Drake family ; in a quaint letter written in 1692, suggesting a marriage between Sir Francis Leicester of Tabley and Lady Mary Drake of "Sharloe," the writer says :—"I suppose you have heard of Sir Ffrancis Drake that was in Queen Elizabeth's tyme and a Drake by character stamped on her shilling in honor of his name and family, this same Drake is descended of that seed and family," and as a private hint to Sir Francis, he adds—"I could tell you of five hundred ways and tricks they have and use to courte ladyes at London without error or mistake."

A little to the south of Malpas is the village of Bradley, where in 1625 lived and died a hero, Richard Dawson, a humble man and a poor one, whose self-sacrifice is recorded in the Malpas parish register. Smitten with plague, for

this dire calamity was devastating the district, he rose from his bed and aided by his nephew dug a deep hole near his house. In this grave, hallowed only by heroism, he instructed his nephew to place straw; then he entered and lay down "and so dep'ted out of this world." He was a strong man, the register informs us, stronger indeed than the parish clerk meant, and "heavier than his say'd nefew and another wench were able to bury."

Wych Brook, onetime called the River Elfe, forms the boundary line between Cheshire and the isolated bit of Flintshire; here the third and most southerly of the border castles guarded the pass into Cheshire; Oldcastle Hill marks the site of the fortress, overlooking a deep ravine. Fullwich, Foulwich, or Dirtwich were the names given to the salt-springs which at very early times were worked for salt; this was the most convenient place for the traders of Shrewsbury and North Wales to obtain their salt. When Nantwich was stubborn, the Royalists gave orders that all salt must be obtained from here, but Captain Croxton sallied hither one night, and next morning trade was dislocated at Dirtwich. A rather absurd correction was made by the editor of Burghall's *Providence Improved* in connection with this event; he states in a note that Dirtwich is a misspelling of Droitwich. It would have been rather a dangerous outing for the Nantwich train-bands to venture into Worcestershire.

CHAPTER XIII

MALPAS TO NANTWICH

A ROAD running almost due east drops down the hill out of Malpas; it leads to No Man's Heath. Malpas is set on a hill and all east of Malpas seems to be set on many hills, none of them very imposing but giving a pleasing variety to the exercise of the muscles as well as to the landscape. Close to Bickley Hall, which lies on the right before we reach Barmere, is a deep hole filled with water, where in 1657 a "dreadful and most admired calamity" occurred, and "many great oaks and other trees, sunk many yards under ground." In a contemporary tract we learn that "some other trees did sinke downe with the earth into a water prepared to receive them underneath; the fall they made was hideous, representing thunder, or the roaring of a well-laden canon:—there come multitudes of people of all sorts, although in time of harvest, to be spectatours of it. At the first they were afraid to come near it, but, one taking encouragement from another, some at last were perswaded to go to the brink and mouth of the hollow, and one or two were let down with ropes to see what they could discover: they were neither of them let down farr, but they importunately called to be plucked up again." Doubtless this was but a salt subsidence; the sort of occurrence that gives rise to no sensation now in the districts round Northwich and

Over, but at that time the nerves of the people were highly strung, the Nantwich Puritans no doubt thinking this calamity was a punishment for the country Loyalists, while the Cholmondeley following would take it as a Divine warning to the sacrilegious upholders of the victorious Parliament. This dreadful hole is rather too far from the road for me to examine, but I do stop for a few moments to look at Bar Mere, a fair-sized sheet of water which lies in a hollow to the right. Once this hollow was unreclaimed marsh land and the bittern no doubt used to boom amongst the reeds and rushes; now the place looks rather bare and birdless, though some of the many waters in this district are fine places for fowl. At Bickley Town, no town at all, but simply one or two isolated farms, I take the left turn and ride northward, the woods of Cholmondeley Park standing dark on my right against the sky. Cholmondeley Park is a beautiful place, gloriously wooded and with more than half a dozen pools and lakes, beloved of crested grebes and other interesting birds. The modern castle, a fine building, looks exceedingly well seen through the trees of the deer park. Upwards of five hundred acres is park land.

The old Hall of Cholmondeley, such a thorn in the flesh to the Nantwich garrison, stood on the edge of one of the meres in a low, damp situation. When its deep moat and protecting mere were no longer needed to check assault; when it had changed hands more than once, and been shot through and through by Puritan and Cavalier round shot, it was still occupied by the family, until, at the beginning of the last century, its crumbling and battle-beaten walls were demolished, and the great house, Cholmondeley Castle, was erected on the high and dry hillside. The little domestic chapel was restored, and still remains to mark the spot.

Moss Mere, with its beds of water-lilies and the clear reflections of the overhanging trees, comes almost up to the side of the road which runs between the deer park and the

woodlands. Oak palings line the road, and the bracken, ragged robin, and woodland plants have trespassed to the border of the highway, and rabbits in hundreds scuttle away in front of my machine. Are there more rabbits anywhere else in Cheshire? They run across the road, they go galloping with white-tufted tails before me, and pink ears in scores poke out from the multitude of holes that are everywhere in the sandy banks.

The Whitchurch road takes me back to the other side of Bar Mere, for I have gone out of my way to get this glimpse of Cholmondeley; then a ride of a little more than a mile down a narrow but beautiful Cheshire lane, and I cross the canal, that everlasting Shropshire Union, by steep Steer Bridge; Marbury Church is in sight.

What a country this is! Wooded hills, none of them high, lanes bordered with a luxuriant vegetation that tempts one to potter and smell the honeysuckle or pick the wild roses; meres or pools in almost every hollow. From Cholmondeley Park to Combermere, and away over the border into Shropshire, there is a continuous succession of little meres, where coots and moorhens, mallards and grebes revel in the plentiful cover supplied by the aquatic plants. Marbury Meres alone cover twenty-one acres.

Marbury village—do not confuse it with Marbury near Northwich—nestles between its two meres; the dear old church, which has not lost its ancient beauty, stands a little above the water, but so near that its grey tower is reflected on the surface. Round it are clustered black and white cottages, the one nearest with a fine projecting gable, and amongst the trees is the modern and somewhat plain Hall. What a pity the old hall is gone! it was a beautiful brick building with stone facings, the property of the Earls of Shrewsbury and then of the Earl of Bridgewater. Only a few years since it stood, one of the most beautiful of the many Cheshire halls, near the Big Mere.

The wooded hills of Combermere are in front, and passing along their margin I make my way past Marley Hall, a picturesque black and white building that once was the home of the Pooles, towards Wrenbury. Above me rises the hill-side that overlooks Combermere, and on the highest point is a conspicuous memorial column.

In a deep wooded hollow half surrounded by the waters of

Marbury.

the mere stands the Abbey, built on the site of, and partly with the stones of, the monastic house which for many centuries was such a power in Cheshire. Malbanc, Baron of Nantwich, founded the Cistercian Abbey; truly these old monks knew well where to build their houses. Owing to the extravagance of some of the abbots, the monastery got into financial difficulties, and might have come to grief had not

royalty taken it under its sheltering wing and looked after the monks. Later on royalty, in the person of the Defender of the Faith, again cast its eye upon the pleasant lands of Combermere, but the Abbot Massy, wise man, surrendered at once, and so retired on the handsome pension of £50 a year, instead of being strung up like some of the others. So the property passed to Sir George Cotton, esquire of the king, and head of the family who hold the land to-day.

It is asserted that the bells of the Abbey were removed to Wrenbury, and that they still remain there; there is a tradition about their removal which is very similar to the dread story of Rostherne; probably both tales have a similar if not actually the same origin. There are different versions of the story, stating that either the bells were thrown into the mere or that when they were conveyed across one fell overboard. Anyhow,

> They sought to guide from the deep flood tide
> The bells of the monks of yore,

and found much difficulty in the operation. In spite of prophetic warning one of the workmen lost his temper over a particularly obstinate bell, and swore by all the fiends of hell that he would move it. Suddenly the ground crumbled away, and both bell "and the sinful son of clay" disappeared for ever into the depths of Combermere. A more picturesque version tells how a strange figure arose from the water, seized the blasphemer, and dragged him below; and the moral is easy to see.

Field-Marshal Viscount Combermere came of a warlike race; the name of Cotton is well known in military annals. "Leon d'or," as the French called him, was fond of brilliant uniforms—the value of his caparisoned horse and his gorgeous dress were set down at £500—and was reckless about exposing himself under fire. A French officer remarked: "When we break you, we can't catch you, but when you break us, not a single poor devil escapes."

A deputation of the East India Company waited upon the Duke of Wellington. Bhurtpore had defied all their efforts to capture it, and they wanted a strong man.

"You can't do better than have Lord Combermere," the Duke advised. "He is the man to take Bhurtpore."

But the deputation hesitated; Lord Combermere, they said, was not a man "of any great genius."

Wrenbury Mill.

"I don't care a damn about his genius," replied the Duke. "I tell you he's the man to take Bhurtpore." And the great Duke was right, for Lord Combermere, in spite of terrible odds, conquered and captured the town.

Wrenbury is a quiet little village with a delightful village green, a big grass-grown open space in front of the old houses. The fifteenth-century church, with its square tower, faces the green; what village is complete without its square-towered

church? The Grange, near the station, stands on the site of the old monastic house belonging to the monks of Combermere, while the old mill with its huge water-wheel, or perhaps an older one still, was their valuable property, grinding the corn for the Abbey and for all the country round. The martial Lord Combermere lies in this quiet church; his tomb bears witness to his many fights, from Flanders in 1793 to Bhurtpore in 1825.

Following the Nantwich road alongside the quiet canal—there seem very few barges about—I find a turning to the left which leads by a somewhat devious route to Baddiley, where there is a church and a hall and apparently nothing else. There does not seem to be any village of Baddiley, and yet the church does not look like an old domestic chapel. Where did the congregation come from? Really the church is a stone and timber building, but at some time in the past it has been cased with brick; one of the massive old beams runs the whole length of the little building, supporting the roof; some of its timbers are very ancient, contemporaneous with the ancient buildings at Warburton and Peover. Once it was enriched with much fine carving and some famous stained glass, but these have all been taken to Acton and elsewhere. Baddiley Church, with its curious two-bell cot at the western end, stands now neglected and forlorn, a relic and remnant of the ecclesiastical glory of the past. The Hall beyond it is a huge brick farmstead, a fine old building; in the fields which I cross, for I attempt a short cut, are scores of roan and white dairy-cattle; Baddiley is a great place for Cheshire's produce—cheese.

The footpath across the fields towards Stonely Green is not to be recommended. Some idea of the deserted state of Baddiley can be guessed at, for the ancient road, on the other side of the now disused bridge, is completely grass-grown; it is with the greatest difficulty that I can ride over the uneven field. At Stonely the fields still bear the name of Raven's

Moor, but ravens and moorland alike have disappeared for ever. Shortly I strike the Nantwich road at Acton Church.

A little to the north lies Stoke Hall, the residence of the Mynshulls, which for long bore the reputation of being the home of Milton's third wife. This is incorrect; Elizabeth Mynshull belonged to another branch of the family, which

Baddiley Church.

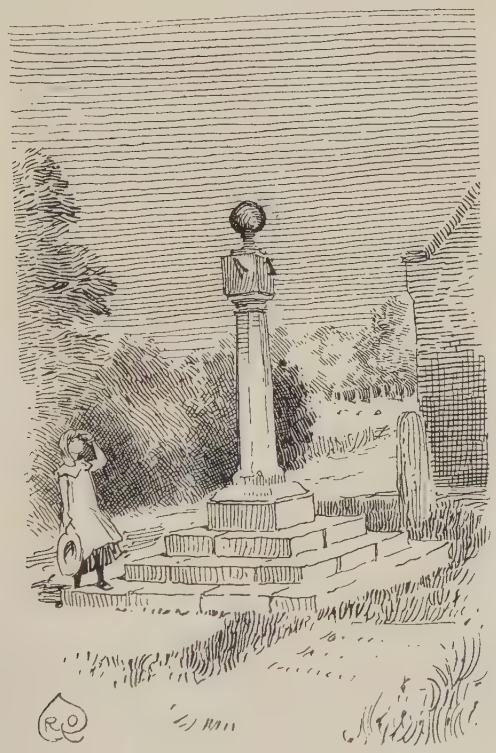
resided at Wistaston, between Nantwich and Crewe; it was Pennant's unlucky guess which led to the confusion. Milton certainly married a Mynshull, a Cheshire Mynshull, for his third wife, but another tradition, that he himself was a Cheshire man, and that he was buried at Nantwich, is certainly "not proven."

There is a queer-looking house on this road, with a bay window almost overhanging the roadway at Verona, which was for long deemed to be haunted. When the London mail rattled through at night, the driver pointed out this house to the awe-struck traveller on the box-seat, and told him weird tales of a white figure which flitted about the house before cockcrow. At last the ghost was seen and challenged by some one braver than the rest, who discovered that it was only his landlady going to tend her cows in *demi-toilette*, but it was not till later that the real origin of the mail-coach myth was discovered. Either this old lady, or another living in the house, got weary of the continual tooting of the horn in the small hours of the morning, so one dark night she lay in wait, and just as the coach passed, threw up her window and dropped a sheet neatly over the horses. In the confusion that followed the sheet was left on the road, and the driver was firmly convinced that he had received a visitation from the other world. Let us hope that he gave up disturbing her rest after that.

I join the road at the little village of Acton, with its quaint old-fashioned public-house and its fine old church. The churchyard comes right up to the roadside, and almost the first object which attracts attention is a tall sundial, perched on three stone steps and surmounted by a round knob. Only an architect could describe this interesting old church, with its massive square tower, decorative pinnacles and balls, and the elaborate carving on its chancel end. The weathered ancient work contrasts with recently restored portions, the latter especially in the nave, while old worn stones and newly cut ones to replace them lie in the road and churchyard, for restoration is at present in hand.

Inside as out it is interesting; nowhere have I met with oak panelling that pleased me more. Carefully examining this, I see that some of it has been renewed, but with such tender care and accurate reproduction that no difference shows from

a little distance. Carefully cleaned of all traces of the paint and whitewash of less particular days, the natural oak gives a clean airy appearance to the screenwork and panels; the place



The Sundial, Acton.

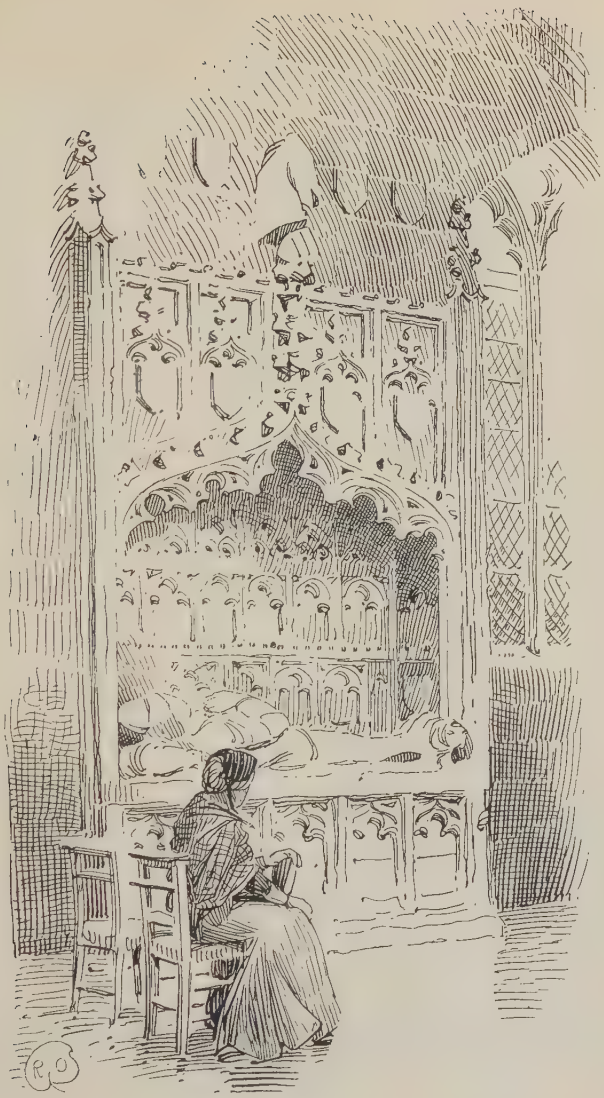
looks light and cheerful, not sombre and gloomy. The round Norman font was rescued from the vicarage pigstye, where it had lain no one knows how long. Sir William Mainwaring bequeathed his body and his "picture in alabaster to cover his

tomb" to Acton Church, together with a bit of the true Cross, which his brother's wife had kept safely enclosed in wax. Sir William's "picture" has suffered a little from the chippings of many ages of sacrilegious people, and what is worse, the soft stone has proved an attraction to many of those fools who persist in leaving their despicable initials engraved on every ancient monument; but the effigy is a fine one and the carving of its heavy canopy is worthy of note. Richard Wilbraham and his wife recline on another altar tomb in the chancel; theirs is a finely carved grave, and the faces are exquisite work, but in point of antiquity it is a child compared with Sir William's, being nearly two hundred and fifty years younger.

Before the Dissolution Acton Church belonged to the Abbey of Combermere, and the landlord of the "Star Inn," an old half-timbered roadside hostelry, tries to persuade me that the rings in the wall and the horseblock were used by the monks when they rode over to take service. Doubtless the trees in the little grove hard by, which I believe is still Combermere property, served the purpose of outdoor stables for the steeds of the monks, but the walls of the "Star," I fancy, were erected somewhat later than the sixteenth century, old though they are.

Dorfold Hall is a fine place, a good old brick building with stone facings, massive chimney-stacks, great bays and gables, heavy lead pipings and rich ornamentation. It is a grand specimen of the work of its day; Sir Ralph Wilbraham built it in 1616, and from his family it passed to the Tomkinsons and so to the Tollemaches who own it to-day.

A great iron gateway gives entrance to the drive, which leads straight to the courtyard in front of the Hall; on the right is a good sheet of water, on the left an avenue of old timber, where the jackdaws are bickering round their nests. Once the pool extended right to the front of the house, doubtless serving the purpose of a moat, and the drive passed through the avenue, sweeping up to an oval lawn by the entrance. A carved stone



The Mainwaring Tomb.

mastiff, tending her whelps with no amiable countenance, guards the approach, and on either side are what at first sight appear to be wings of the house, which in reality are but brick screens furnished with dummy windows and doors. A little to the right, by the stables, is a truly magnificent Spanish chestnut, whose low spreading limbs are so huge that they require strong crutches to keep them from breaking down with their own weight. A sundial, modelled from one at Holyrood, and a seventeenth-century font from Acton decorate the terrace of the dear old-fashioned garden, while in the walled-in fruit-gardens are choice trees which bring forth their fruit in due season. There are blackberry-raspberry and strawberry-blackberry crosses, which in autumn bear most tempting-looking berries. The stone lion that decorates the fine gateway, and in fact the gateway itself which leads into the fruit-garden, came from Townsend House, Richard Wilbraham's home in Nantwich.

In the house is the room prepared for King James's visit, with its ornate 1621 fireplace; there are solid oak staircases, curious closets, supposed to be hiding-places, an Adam's ceiling, and a truly magnificent drawing-room with a ceiling decorated with most elaborate pendants, said to rank amongst the finest examples of Elizabethan work extant.

During the struggle between King and Parliament the fate of Acton and Dorfold was closely knit with the neighbouring town of Nantwich. Mr. Wilbraham of Dorfold, like Sir Richard Wilbraham, was a strong supporter of Sir William Brereton, whose headquarters were at Nantwich; very early in the struggle, even before hostilities had broken out, these two were imprisoned at Shrewsbury, where Sir Richard died, although they had by their personal intervention already stopped some skirmishes between the army and militia.

It is impossible to say anything about the actions in which Acton and Dorfold played so prominent a part without mentioning Nantwich, so I will speak of them together before I proceed

Dorfold Hall.

to the town itself. Nantwich, as I have said before, was all through firm to the Parliament, while Whitchurch, Shrewsbury, and Chester for long remained loyal to their monarch. In 1642 feeling was running high in Nantwich, and in August there was nearly an outbreak between the rival parties, which was only prevented by Mr. Wilbraham on the one side and Mr. Werden on the other. A month later Lord Grandison entered the town and disarming the militia laid a heavy fine upon the town for its disloyalty; it is doubtful if it was paid. At the end of January 1643 Sir William Brereton met for the first time his opponent Sir Thomas Aston, and the latter, who had hoped to take and subdue the town, was defeated with heavy loss. Then Sir William issued his memorable manifesto and summons to a general muster, and the fat was fairly in the fire.

Lord Capel now made his headquarters at Whitchurch, and for months a war raged in which comparatively few were slain, but much country was laid waste, for the rival forces occupied their time in sacking the property of all gentlemen who did not agree with their particular views. We find Brereton looting near Chester, and while his back is turned Capel is harrying the outskirts of Nantwich, much cattle and provender being stolen from Acton and Dorfold; the Nantwich forces retaliating as soon as Sir William has returned to lead them, taking cattle from the Shropshire borders.

Fifteen hundred men, under Lord Capel, almost succeeded in entering Nantwich on the 17th of May, and for some time there was a lively exchange of compliments between the rival artillery, in which the "wyld fier Balls" of the town gunners did most execution. They retired, "being not able to staye," having slain nought save one calf.

> The Lord Capel with a thousand and a half,
> Came to Barton-Cross, and there they kill'd a calf,
> And staying there until the break of day,
> They took their heels and fast they ran away.

A few days later Sir William made a night march and surprised Whitchurch, entering and looting the town, though "they dealt friendly with the townsmen, taking little of their goods, only the enemies." Farndon, Shocklach, and Carden were visited on their way home, and a good supply of beef was brought back to Nantwich. Then the Nantwich troops got too puffed up with their successes, and venturing far into Shropshire were cut off by the Welsh under Lord Capel, and badly beaten. August saw Lord Capel following up his victory by attacking Nantwich, Brereton being then at Stafford; at first the town troops came forth to meet him, but as the King's army gathered they retreated behind their fortifications. At daybreak on the 4th the Cavaliers opened fire upon the town, and for three or four hours in a thick mist the opposing parties pounded blindly at each other at very close quarters. All day the skirmish continued, and at night the garrison sallied forth and burnt cottages, houses, and barns to prevent the enemy from again gaining shelter.

Acton and Dorfold were garrisoned by the Parliament, but they do not seem to have been occupied when, in October, Lord Capel came again against the town. They speedily were, however, for the Nantwich trainbands and townsmen came forth from behind their walls and drove the Royalists into the Hall and the church, scattering the rest of the soldiers over the fields, where till nightfall a dropping fire was maintained from tree to tree. The besiegers left next morning, only to return in greater force some two months later, when again Dorfold fell into their hands. Not so Acton, for though the troops were gathered round Nantwich, hemming it in on every side, they failed to dislodge the little garrison which barricaded itself within the church. It speaks well for the building that it withstood the fire of their ordnance. Then began the worst time for Nantwich. From Dorfold the enemy fired red-hot balls into the town, which would have caused terrible conflagration had not the women of the town worked bravely, their

labour being, while their husbands manned the walls, to quench the fires.

Shut in by the besieging forces so that no provisions could be obtained and no market held, Nantwich at the end of a month began to feel want; but fortunately so large a supply of absolute necessaries had been laid in that actual famine was averted, and the townsmen stuck to their earthworks and the women to their buckets in spite of the pounding balls and whistling musket bullets. On January 16 a fierce assault was made and repulsed, and amongst the Royalist slain was the redoubtable Captain Sandford, the captor of Beeston; in his pockets were discovered more threatening letters, for Sandford loved to shake the nerves of his adversaries by telling them what he was going to do. "Let not your zeal in a bad cause dazzle your eyes any longer," one of the letters said. "Believe me, Gentlemen, I have laid by my former delay, and now am resolved to batter, burn, and storm you."

From one of these letters we must conclude that the little garrison at Acton Church had either capitulated or retired into Nantwich, for Sandford says: "Mr. Drum can inform you, that Acton Church is no more a prison, but now free for honest men to do their devotion therein." It was on the 25th that the siege was finally raised by Fairfax and his Lancashire troops, who, after fighting their way across Delamere Forest, found the main body collected at Acton. Early in the afternoon they attacked the King's troops, and the Nantwich train-bands falling upon the rear caused a diversion, so that the Royalists fled, leaving all their stores and some sixteen hundred prisoners in the hands of the victorious Puritans; comparatively few were slain on either side. A day or two later a solemn thanksgiving was celebrated, but not in the church, for Burghall informs us it had been used as a prison and had not been cleaned; the lot of the prisoners in Nantwich Church was probably not a very happy one.

Nantwich still remained firm in its adherence to the Par-

liament, sometimes suffering alarm on the approach of the Cavaliers, sometimes suffering loss from pillage on its outskirts; always a valuable headquarters for Brereton's troops and a prison for the captured Royalists, until in 1646 the Nantwich forces mutinied, and six months later the town was disgarrisoned and the forces disbanded by the Deputy-Lieutenant. So ended, somewhat disgracefully, the important part which the town took in the great rebellion.

My day's journey ends at Nantwich; Welsh Row is the name of the street by which I enter the town. This name is supposed to date back to the time when the Welsh did considerable trade with Nantwich in salt-buying in very early days. The Welsh, however, did not always come peaceably to the town, and a long war of retaliation was carried on between the Cheshire men and the Celts from over the border. Henry III. went so far as to close the brine-pits, so that the troublesome Welsh would have no excuse for looting, but through the thirteenth century Lord Audley kept the ball rolling by constantly making reprisals upon the neighbouring country, for the Welsh had laid waste his lands when he was away in Germany. As a salt town—a "wych"—Nantwich enjoys considerable antiquity, many authorities stating that salt was obtained there by the Romans; the earliest reliable information is given in Domesday, where we find that there were eight salt-houses in Saxon days, and that the proceeds were divided between the king and earl. When Earl Hugh came into unlawful possession of the town only one salt-house was left; all the rest was waste. Like most of unhappy Cheshire, and in fact the rest of conquered England, Norman fire and sword had devastated the place, so that there was no other description for it but "waste."

Nantwich was one of the Earl's baronries, and so it remained until 1497, when the Cornish rising cost Sir James Tochet, Lord Audley, his estates and his head. The last Baron of Wich-Malbanc, the ancient name of the place, was dragged

from Newgate to Tower Hill in a torn paper coat painted with

Welsh Row.

his own reversed arms. Subsequently the Crown delivered or sold the baronry, and the Cholmondeley family became

possessors of the title of Baron of Nantwich, though many of the perquisites of the title had become extinct.

Nantwich.

Welsh Row is a fine old street from an antiquarian point of view. It contains many dilapidated but highly picturesque old wattle and daub and half-timber houses. Welsh Row and

Wood Street are perhaps the oldest parts of the town, for they escaped the devastating fire of December 1583. In the Parish Registers there is a quaint account of this fire which has been often published, but which will bear repetition. Not having access to the registers myself, I have taken the spelling from Hall's History, which is considered to be the most correct. Hall's wording and spelling differs very considerably from other accounts, but doubtless the writing is very hard to make out. Some of the accounts are known to be full of errors.

The X day of this Monnth chaunced a most tereble and vehement fyre begininge at the water lood about VI of the clocke at night, in a Kitchen by Bruinge, the winde being very boysterous, increased ye sayd fyre, which very vehemently wasted and consumed (in the space of 15 houres) 600 bayes of buildinges, and could not be stayed nether by labour nor pollitye, which I thought good to comend unto the posterety as a favorable punishment of th' almightye in destroyinge the buildins and goods only, but sparing the lyves of many people (wch considering ye time space and perell) were in great jopardy yet by gods mercye, but only two persons that pereshed by fyre. Alen Wrighte whoe sawe the saide ffire and wrotte this.

Such is Wright's account, and Richard Wilbraham's confirms it and adds other particulars.

And in this crewell ffier there was left no manner of tymber bylding stick or block of Any house in all these streetes & compasse thereof named except one piece of a wall of a howse wherein ytt began, wch peece of the same wall standing till the day ffollowing in the afoor noon As women were carrying water from weever yt fell downe & kylled a woman carrying of water whoe was wyffe of Thoms. lovatt.

Fire and falling walls were not the only terrors, for amongst the buildings destroyed was the "Bear Inn" belonging to "Jon Seckerston, who having in his stable iiij great beyres of his dyd lose them out in the beginning to the streete," and

the women were so terrified that they dare not carry water when the men were not by them with weapons, "& much goodes were brought out off the howses & more stollen and moste burned in the howses."

For twenty days the fire burned in the cellars and "in the yerth," and when the rubbish was all cleared away Queen Elizabeth headed a subscription list for the rebuilding of the town with £1000, according to Wilbraham, though Partridge puts it at double the amount, and collections being made in churches throughout the country, Nantwich soon arose again like a Phœnix, to which Whitney, the celebrated Nantwich poet, likens it.

On a beam in a grocer's shop in High Town was or is an inscription—

GOD GRANTE OVR RYAL QVEEN
IN ENGLAND LONGE TO RAIGN
FOR SHE HATH PVT HER HELPING
HAND TO BILD THIS TOWNE AGAIN
THOMAS CLEESE MADE THIS WORKE
THE YEARE OF OVRE LORDE
GOD 1584.

As might be imagined, the people of Nantwich were in no hurry to have another fire, so an elaborate water supply was laid throughout the town; conduits made of hollowed trees fitted one into the other, with taps here and there, conveyed water to all parts; some of these pipes were dug up a short time since and found to be in excellent preservation. Rough old water-pipes of this description are not uncommon in Cheshire; there are some lying by a lane side near Knutsford, and many of them in different places may be found converted into gate-stumps.

The salt industry was at one time as important here as anywhere, although there was only one spring when Leland

visited the town, but he states "the Pittes be so set abowte with Canales that the Salte Water is facily derivid to every Mannes Howse." In 1563 Smith says there were 216 wiche houses in Nantwich. There are now two salt springs, but French competition crippled the works—during the wars the salt duty was fifteen shillings per bushel, and in 1822 it sank to two shillings—so at the commencement of the last century the brine pits were closed. It was not until 1882 that the springs were once more cleaned out, and now the salt water flows into the newly erected medicinal baths. Other industries have had their entrances and their exits in the town; an ancient corn mill was in 1789 turned into a cotton mill, and another one was erected. For some time the cotton-spinning industry flourished, for at that time the hands employed were nothing more nor less than slaves — poor children bought from the workhouses in different parts of the country and bound apprentice to a set of hard taskmasters. This may or may not have been applicable to the old mill which stands by the riverside at the end of Welsh Row—it certainly was to many of the early factories in Lancashire and Derbyshire—but as I lean over the river bridge I cannot forget that a guinea reward and sixpence per mile expenses for every mile exceeding eight was offered by the owners of that self-same mill to any one who should bring back runaway apprentices. They did not always kill their slaves, however, for an old woman died at Nantwich in 1878, who ninety years before, when only eight years old, had been brought, or bought if you like, from Cirencester to be bound apprentice at "Bott's Mill."

Fogg's Mill was burnt down in 1799 and Bott's Mill, enlarged soon after, was only closed in 1874, when part reverted to a corn mill, and now a portion is used as a clothing factory. Boots and shoes and ready-made clothing have replaced the trade of salt "walling" and cotton-spinning. The leather industry is more than three hundred years old,

and used to be carried on by the cobblers in their cottages, who every now and then tramped or went down by the carrier's cart to sell their wares in Shudehill Market in Manchester. The coach would have taken away all their hard-

Nantwich Church.

earned profits. In 1656 a pair of men's shoes only realised 3s., but the price went steadily up until in 1838 9s. 6d. could be obtained.

There is a great deal to be seen in Nantwich. Hall speaks

of "the Cathedral-like Church, with its tree-adorned graveyard," and the church is indeed a beautiful pile. Its fine octagonal tower, its lofty ancient nave, its chapels and monuments, make it alike interesting without and within. There is a magnificent stone pulpit, and the upper story of an old oak "three-decker," and in the choir are twenty quaintly carved canopied stalls, with misereres, grotesque and satirical.

Sweet Briar Hall is a beautiful old gabled house that escaped the all-devouring fire, and in Hospital Street there is the fine gateway of Wright's Almshouses, founded chiefly for indigent poor—Church of England preferred—who could boast the name of their founder. A glance at the list, however, shows that only some fifteen of the inhabitants of this charitable institution were named Wright; perhaps all the other Wrights in this town were nonconformists or too independent to require charitable aid. Every year on the day of the commemoration of the founder's baptism a quart of ale was allowed to each of the inmates at a dinner which was provided at the "Crown" or the "Lamb."

The girls' school—to be precise, "the Ladies' Seminary,"—in the same street, is Webb's "fair timber-house of Mr. Randol Church, a gentleman of singular integrity." Thomas Cleese seems to have had a good time when rebuilding Nantwich after the fire, for this is another of his erections, only he was not quite sure how his own name was spelt and so varied it to suit the taste of all parties.

> "Rycharde Churche and Margarye Churche, his wyfe, Mai iiii,
> "Thomas clease made this worke anno dni mccccclxxvii."

is the inscription on the richly carved beam, but I should like to know what the curly-tailed "asker" is that ornaments one of the timbers.

Partridge, who wrote a somewhat imaginary history of the town at the close of the eighteenth century, gives a long description of the annual fête of "Blessing the Brine," a

thanksgiving for the gift of the old pit, but all recollection of this ceremony, save the accounts taken from Partridge and the modern Cheshire ballad, has been lost.

Nantwich has turned out some famous men. Major-General

The Ladies Seminary.

Thomas Harrison, who was cruelly executed as a regicide, was supposed to be a native of the town; and there was Geoffrey Whitney, the Elizabethan poet, who wrote the *Choice of Emblemes.* One of the best known names is John Gerard, of the *Herball, or Generall Historie of Plants.*

In this quaint botany there is frequent mention of Nantwich and Cheshire, for Gerard's early life, perhaps the best time for study, was spent in the county.

"The people in Cheshire, especially about Namptwich where the best Cheese is made, do use it" (Ladies' Bedstraw) "in their Rennet, esteeming greatly of that Cheese aboue other made without it."

There are many towns and villages in Cheshire which would dispute Gerard's statement that the best cheese is made at Nantwich.

CHAPTER XIV

AUDLEM, SANDBACH, AND SOUTHERN CHESHIRE

The coach-road to London leaves Nantwich and runs eastward before turning south; looking at the old houses one can well imagine the toot of the horn as the mail rattled over the cobbles to Barton's Cross. The road I choose, however, runs roughly parallel to the London road, but takes a rather more direct course towards Audlem; it crosses the railway close to the station. It is a good road, though a little up and down, taking a very decided dip to Artle Brook, yet all the country here is level, compared with the district south-east of Malpas. Two miles further comes Hatherton, and then the little open space, a relic of breezy common, Birchall Moss. There is another little wayside green or common at Hankelow, where the ling is growing on the village football field; at one time all this country must have been dotted with these waste lands.

Passing a plain but interesting-looking old farm, a straight, severe building with two equal gables at opposite ends, called The Park, I reach Little Heath, where two roads diverge, both, however, running into Audlem; away on the right, near the canal, is Moss Hall, once the home of the Masseys, which, according to a date on one of its oak beams, was built in 1016; did the carvers of these misleading dates believe what they inscribed, or were they taking a rise out of future generations? All along this road are ancient black-and-white cottages, but

many of them have undergone a strange alteration; their rotten thatch has been removed and a corrugated iron roof substituted; no doubt it is drier to sleep beneath, but it is not picturesque.

Audlem stands somewhat on the side of a hill; the time-

Audlem

honoured church, one of the most substantial-looking in Cheshire, being situated in a commanding position in the middle of the little market town. Below the church, right against the church-yard wall, is the queer little open-air market-house, a mere shed supported on pillars. Down the lane below the church is the

Free Grammar School; a fair-sized building now, for wings have been added at different times to the seventeenth century erection. The old schoolhouse forms the backbone of the present building; it is not hard to recognise, for a row of dormer windows and rather shaky chimney stacks adorn its high-pitched roof. The great warrior, Viscount Combermere, was here the schoolfellow of an embryo Archbishop of York; they were only two of many famous men whose early education was obtained at Audlem. The gateway of the school still stands, and by its side is the mounting-block, now never used.

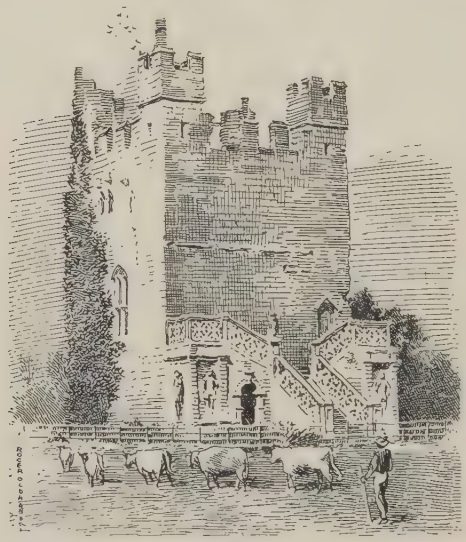
The lanes eastward, with the exception of the Woore road, are not of the best; therefore I return to Birchall Moss, and turn to the right near the elaborately timbered Yew Tree House, and passing through the hamlet of Hunsterston reach Bridgemere, where I hit the London road, and turn north to Doddington Park.

A splendid road, and a fine view is the reward for choosing this route; for nearly two miles the broad parkland lies on the left; first, there are glimpses of the Hall, a somewhat severe and heavy-looking house, across the grebe-haunted mere, and then amongst the hoary oaks we see the last bit of the ancient castle, for Doddington Hall is an infant compared with the single tower, which is all that remains of the embattled pile which Sir John Delves erected in 1364. Doddington Park wall is not, strictly speaking, a ha-ha, for there is no sunk fence, but it serves the same purpose; the road runs level with the park, and the wall of a deep ditch lines the highway, a second wire fence protecting the park side of the ditch; it is a good arrangement and quite effective, although on a dark night a belated wanderer might get a nasty fall; perhaps the inhabitants of Bridgemere do not go out at night.

When in the narrow lane, between the hedges and vineyards of Maupertuis, the French cavalry, three hundred strong, charged on the archers of the Black Prince, five warriors "dyd marvels in arms, and foughte always in the cheyfe of the

batayle." These were James, Lord Audley, and his four Cheshire squires—Dutton of Dutton, Foulshurt of Crewe, Hawkeston of Wrine Hill, and Delves of Doddington. So Sir John, who built yonder tower, was one of the five men most responsible for the victory of Poictiers.

A sign-post on the right points to Wybunbury, and no sooner have I left the high road than the tall tower of the



Doddington Castle.

church shows above the hill. "As crooked as Wembury steeple" is no longer applicable to anything out of the plumb, for the spire, which was nearly six feet out of the perpendicular, was replaced some seventy years ago by the present tower; the saying still lingers in South Cheshire. Only a portion of the tower was rebuilt, and the battered figure of the Virgin still crowns the west window; below are two ladies and two bishops,

but they have undergone repair like the steeple, for they were in reach of Roundhead pikes, and lost their heads during the Civil War. "The Swan," the public-house near the church gate, has a most attractive round bay window, and, standing a little back from the village street, adds greatly to the charm of the place.

The Cliff, the neat house, black timber and white plaster, was one of the old Cheshire family seats, and afterwards a farm; now it has again been renovated and but little of its ancient work is discernible, yet it looks well amongst the trees at the corner, overlooking what was once Wybunbury Mere. To the north of the village is Hough Heath, a small tract of waste, grown with bog myrtle and stunted bushes; a warning notice forbids gipsies and other trespassers from imagining that it is common land. At Swill Brook there is a choice of roads, the left leading to Crewe, the right to Audley, and the centre, which I chose, to Weston Green, where I turn towards Crewe Hall.

Beyond Weston, just half a mile from the county border, is a village which suffered more than almost any other during the Wars. Barthomley Church, surrounded by the ancient cottages, the little bow-windowed grocer's shop, and the village inn, looks peaceful enough to-day; sadly different was the scene that black Christmas of 1643, when terror-stricken rustics ran in from the countryside to tell of the dire destruction that had wasted their homes. Audlem, Hankelow, Buerton, and Hatherton were devastated by Lord Byron's fierce soldiers, and even now Major Connought, with a strong following, was looting the farms as he slowly approached Barthomley, leaving sorrow and destruction in his wake. Three days before Christmas he entered the village, where a score of terrified villagers had sought sanctuary in the church. Connought immediately attacked the building, and meeting with little resistance, possessed himself of the body of the church, the refugees flying to the steeple, where they hoped to be able to defend the turret stair. Smashing the pews and

sweeping up the sweet-scented rushes which littered the floor, the soldiers piled a bonfire at the foot of the staircase, and throwing all the mats they could lay hands on into the blaze, raised such a smoke that the poor folk were obliged to sue for quarter. Yes, it was granted, and half-smothered, smoke-blackened, pale-faced men rushed through the fire to yield themselves up to the mercy of their captors. Mercy! There was little mercy in the minds of those rapine-heated cavaliers. As each emerged he was made prisoner, and the cruel soldiers ripped his clothes from his back, stabbing and hacking him if he made resistance. All but three were sorely wounded, and twelve were killed outright; even the major seized one young man named Fowler, and cut his throat with his own hands, as if his poor victim had been a sheep. Then the soldiers billeted themselves in the village, and for three days ran riot where and how they listed. Crewe, Haslington, and Sandbach were visited and plundered, and throughout the district the worst horrors of war were experienced; houses were burnt, and goods destroyed; all that was worth stealing was stolen, even to the clothes of men and women who were left without pity, naked and ashamed. Had King Charles pleaded when he was tried, the massacre of Barthomley was to have been one of the charges brought against him.

Shall I be laughed at when I say that Crewe is little changed since the days when the old Hall was built? What about the great junction, and the teeming population that the North-Western Company employ in their locomotive works? What about the manufacturing establishments which have recently sprung up around the station? What about its member of Parliament, and its railway engineers—the men who sent volunteers to render signal service in South Africa? All this I grant, but then the present Crewe is not the ancient Crewe; the railway town, which is now called Crewe, is built in Monk's Coppenhall, and a portion of Church Coppenhall; very little, indeed, is within the old township of Crewe.

The Hall is nearly two miles from the town, situated in an extensive park with a sheet of ornamental water; it is a fine brick building, decorated with diamond-shaped brick-work of a darker colour, and with stone string-courses, mullions, and cornices. It is indeed little altered since it was completed in 1639. About the middle of the sixteenth century there lived in Nantwich a man named John Crewe; he was descended from the family who centuries before had owned the manor of that name, but untoward times had overtaken them and their broad acres had passed into other hands. John had two sons, and on these sons he urged his great desire that some day they should retrieve the family honour and win back the family inheritance. Stirred by their father's ambition, the two boys studied hard, the law being their chosen course in life; how they acquitted themselves we know by subsequent events. In after-life—alas! too late for old John to see that his wishes were realised—either of them was in a position to purchase the family estates, but the triumph came to Randolph. What he was we know from Lord Campbell; studious and plodding he rose rung by rung on the ladder of fame, but more than mere ability raised him to a position above his fellows, for young Randolph Crewe soon showed that he cared less for power than for integrity. His was an age when a promising young man could rise by favour to almost any height if he would stoop to do a dirty trick for his patron, but, says Lord Campbell, "considering the times in which he lived, the independent spirit which he displayed is beyond all praise." So when the rising lawyer was called to represent his county in parliament his career there was short; he left that particular line, disgusted with the times, and continued in the law. By honest work, fearlessly honest, he stepped still higher, until in 1624 he had risen to be head of the King's Bench. Lord Chief-Justice Crewe, however, was too straight a man for his king, and when he refused to sanction the imposition of taxes without the authority of Parliament, he was—to his great glory

—turned out of office. When nearly seventy the wise, honest old lawyer retired from public life to country pursuits and pleasures, glad "that he had done his duty, and that he was delivered from temptation." Then it was that Crewe Manor unexpectedly came into the market, and though his income was much reduced, Sir Randolph Crewe had carefully saved enough to buy the old family estate and to build the magnificent Hall in which Lord Crewe resides to-day. He died at eighty-six, having "enjoyed the sympathy and respect of all honest men."

And now the name of Crewe has spread to the remote little hamlet of Monk's Coppenhall, where Idonea Waschet gave to God, St. Mary, and the Abbey of Combermere a mill on the little stream; and now the bumping hopper no more sounds, but the thundering steam-hammers crash in the sheds, and where the springless wains dragged their loads of wheat and flour over the ill-paved roads, the racing mail-trains thunder over their iron paths. Here is the hub of the greatest railway system in England; southward to London, northward to Scotland, eastward to Lancashire and Yorkshire, and westward to Wales, bearing the mails to and from the great cities of our Islands, America, and the Continent, the panting black-painted engines with their trains of white carriages pass forth from Crewe Station. Day and night that platform—those platforms rather—are busy scenes; train after train arrives, crowds hurry here and there, coaches are shunted from this route to that, and the trains pass out again on their long journeys, only to be followed a minute or two later by some new arrival. Outside the station proper is a meshwork of lines, worked by a maze of signals perfectly bewildering to the uninitiated; and yet day by day and night by night that wonderful traffic continues without ceasing, and usually without a hitch.

In the census of 1901 there were 67 houses and 406 inhabitants in Crewe, but in Monk's Coppenhall the population

was given as 42,074, and the inhabited houses numbered 8762; this shows how much of Crewe is really Crewe. The motto of Crewe—the modern Crewe, I mean—is "Never behind"; this does not unfortunately always apply to the trains, but when we consider that within the last sixty odd years—the station was built in 1837—over 4000 locomotives have been turned out from Crewe works, we cannot say that the place is behind the times.

By keeping to the eastward of the park I avoid both Crewe and its station, for though I have a great respect for rising municipalities, I must confess that when cycling I prefer the country. At Haslington, after crossing Slauter Hill Bridge, I join the Sandbach Road and shortly reach Wheelock, now a busy salt-town, a village converted by the alkali works of Brunner, Mond. Wheelock is the modern Sandbach.

Sandbach Church, a fine building with a tower set on open arches, stands in a commanding position overlooking the valley of the Wheelock; on the hill too which leads down to the river is the old hall, now most of it an inn, a beautiful black-and-white building, which, though it has been largely restored, retains much of its old timber and character. Quaint gables project from hostelries and shops and town mansions of the past over the crooked streets that diverge from the cobbled market-place; Sandbach is an antique-looking town. But if the church and hall and shops are old, what about the two crosses that stand on a rough sandstone pedestal in the old market-place? it is considered by good authorities that at least 1250 years have passed since they were first erected, and also that they are perhaps the earliest Christian monuments of their kind. Certainly in condition there are few to beat them.

Peada, son of that fine old heathen Penda, king of Mercia, fell in love with the daughter of Oswi, King of Northumbria, and was allowed by his father-in-law to retain a portion of his conquered father's domains. Oswi, however, would not sanction the marriage unless Peada renounced the faith of

his father, and so Peada became a Christian and got a wife. It is said that the crosses were set up to commemorate the return of the new convert with his bride. If we are to believe that old monk William of Malmesbury, Peada's lady —Alchfleda, I think, was her name—was a better Christian

Sandbach Crosses.

than a wife, for she is reported to have made arrangements about her husband's premature decease. Perhaps, however, this slur on a lady's character is of as doubtful origin as the connection of these early Christian crosses with Peada himself.

Many vicissitudes have befallen these crosses, though for over a thousand years they stood in their present position. William Smith, who by the way must have known them well, for he was born at the Old Hough not four miles from here, says that they stood "hard together" in the market-place in the days of Queen Elizabeth. He describes "certain images and writings thereon graven; which a man cannot read, except he be holden with his head downwards, and this verse (as they hold opinion) is engraven thereon—

> In Sandbach, in the Sandy Ford,
> Lieth the ninth part of Dublin's hord,
> Nine to, or Nine fro,
> Take me down, or else I fall."

The meaning of this local verse, for that is what I suppose Smith implies, is as obscure as the writing on the pillars. Smith was wise enough to deny another local tradition that dated the erection of the stones to before the birth of our Lord, for he points out that the pictures represent scenes in the life of Christ. These carvings have been most carefully examined and described and they are well worth study; Saxon art was quaint if it was nothing else.

Either after the Reformation or later, when the Puritans objected to anything that savoured of Popery, the Crosses were thrown down and smashed into many fragments, and for more than two hundred years the market-place knew them not. The largest portion—the centre—of the taller cross was taken to Utkinton, where the figure of Christ upon the Cross was coated over with clay; from thence the stone was conveyed to the rectory at Tarporley, and then it found repose in Oulton Park. Dr. Ormerod was chiefly instrumental in gathering the fragments together; his careful search met with success, and when Sir John Grey Egerton agreed to restore his portion, the other bits were collected from many strange hiding-places. One piece was in a wall near the town well, another had been used

as the step of a cottage; some portions were dug up in the market-place itself, and others were found in the street pavement. In 1816, under the superintendence of Mr. John Palmer of Manchester, the Crosses were pieced together and set up in their original situation.

Sandbach, like most other towns, had its share in the Revolution. Local royalists claim that a battle was fought here in which Cromwell's cavalry were cut to pieces; as a matter of fact, neither Cromwell nor his troops had anything to do with it. Some of the cavaliers who behaved so brutally at Barthomley reached and sacked Sandbach, treating men and women most shamefully, and it may have been the memory of this incident which led to Sandbach fight.

The townsfolk of Sandbach one morning were erecting their booths for the fair. Cheshire was peaceful then; England had proclaimed itself a Commonwealth, though Scotland had declared in favour of Charles II. Early that September morning, when nought was expected but the trade and fun of the fair, news came that a large body of horsemen was approaching Sandbach, and almost at once a thousand troopers, urging their wearied horses, entered the town; they were the defeated Leslie's Horse who had left their commander captive in Cromwell's hands at Worcester.

The country folk soon saw that there was not much fight left in these crestfallen soldiers, and stripping down the poles and stakes of their booths and stalls they fell upon them with a will. The vanguard, the only soldiers who had any ammunition left, prepared to fire, but the people, before they had time to do any damage, were safe in their houses. Then, when the armed party had passed, they again set on the rear and "so continued pealing them and billing them" that the poor Scotchmen were only anxious to get away from these stalwart Cheshire lads. Numbers were unhorsed, not a few killed, and some hundred remained as prisoners in the town gaol. Many of the poor fellows had been obliged to leave their lame and dead-beat

horses and were straggling on foot across the fields; they, too, fell an easy prey to the farmers, for some of them were so tired that prison only meant a rest. Two countrymen, aided by a dog, brought in sixteen stragglers whom they had captured in the fields.

About a mile from Sandbach station, on the road from Stud Green to Occleston, is a spot I wish to visit, for here Thomas Venables slew the dragon. A tiny brooklet runs beneath the road, flowing to Sanderson's Brook and thence to the Dane, and where it crosses is a shallow depression, now well-tilled fields but once the Dragon's Lake.

> A dragon Cheshire troubled sore,
> Insatiate was his horrid maw;
> Clotted with blood and poisonous gore,
> Wide wasted he the land.

So sings Egerton Leigh in his Cheshire ballads.

The fearsome creature lay in the swamps of Moston, devouring the unfortunate inhabitants who passed that way, and generally laying waste the land in the most orthodox manner. Now, Thomas Venables of Golborne, "lynyally descended frome Sr Gilbart Venables, Knight, coosyn garman to Kynge William Conqueror, and came with hym unto Englande," heard of the foul beast; and "following the example of the valliant Romans, and other worthy men, not regarding his own life, in comparison of the commodity and safeguard of his countrymen, did in his own person valiantly and courageously set on the said Dragon, which first he shot him through with an arrow, and afterwards with other weapons manfully slew him, at which instant the said Dragon was devouring of a child."

There are no swamps here now, even the Dragon's Lake is drained. But the story must be true, for did not Sir Thomas Venables, Baron of Kinderton, tell it all to Lawrence Dalton, Norrey King of Arms, in the second year of good Queen Bess?

and did not the said Lawrence grant him as a crest a dying dragon, with an arrow in its eye, eating an unfortunate infant? The Cheshire dragon is a much more recent beast than most of its heraldic fraternity; for the valorous Thomas who slew it lived in the reign of Henry VI. The Patent of Augmentation, from which I have taken the "facts," only modernising the spelling, is dated 1560, and the Venables before this date wore for a crest a wyvern, a creature as anatomically wonderful as a dragon, so that we may conclude that the Baron and Dalton put their heads together and found it convenient, "to gain some private end," to credit the story. Mr. Leigh's version is given with his usual poetic fancy and detail; the dying shriek of the mortally wounded creature was heard at Beeston. How Cheshire must have trembled!

A fine road runs south from Sandbach to Rode Heath, where a sharp turn to the left brings me to the park of Rode. All along this side of the park is the pool, a narrow sheet of water much beloved by grebes and coots; beyond is the Hall, pleasantly situated amongst the trees, and away behind are the wooded slopes of Mow Cop, or rather Roe Park, with the Old Man of Mow on the bare scalp of the hill—the real end of the long border range—that rises hundreds of feet above us. Mow Cop, somewhat isolated from Congleton Edge, the ridge that forms the Staffordshire border, is one of the Cheshire landmarks. On its summit are some artificial ruins erected at the end of the eighteenth century by Randle Wilbraham of Rode; it does for south Cheshire, and indeed for a great part of the country, what Helsby Hill, Alderley Edge, Bosley Cloud, and more especially High Billinge, do for other parts; its very isolation and conical shape make it more conspicuous than the long whale-back of Bosley Minn, which is over 250 feet higher.

There are two or three lanes that lead across to the Newcastle Road, but if the cyclist is in doubt he has only to ask for Moreton Hall, and although there are two halls of this name, it is a hundred to one that he will be directed to the

right one, for Moreton Old Hall is a deservedly favourite resort of cyclists. The Hall, undoubtedly the most interesting sixteenth century house in Cheshire, stands a little way back from the road, and perhaps the thing that strikes most people as they approach is its size; it looks almost a toy-house. A tree-crowned mound on the right is a good place from which to get a general idea of the building, and then we can approach the wide moat and cross the bridge to the gatehouse. The

Moreton Old Hall.

present owner of the Old Hall has, without destroying the ancient beauties, made many necessary repairs, for the walls were bulging, and were it not for props, crutches, and struts, the old place would have long since collapsed like a pack of cards.

The building, wholly encircled by the moat, forms three sides of a quadrangle, and as we pass through the gatehouse and enter the courtyard, we lose all disappointment at the size in our admiration of the strange but beautiful building

within. Two magnificent bay windows, each with three gables, confront us, their glass leaded in exquisite designs, and their black timbers in striking contrast to the white plaster; these, however, are but a portion of the fine interior of the court, and that but a fraction of the whole.

The exact date of Old Moreton Hall is not known, though on one of the window beams is the following inscription:—

GOD IS IN AL IN AL THING
THIS WINDOVS WHIRE MADE BY WILLIAM MORETON
IN THE YEARE OF OURE LORDE MDLIX
RICHARDE DALE CARPEDER MADE THIES
WINDOVS BV THE GRAC OF GOD

Dr. Renaud thought that the building was commenced about 1540, and that it is finer than Bramhall. The enclosure within the moat covers an acre, and the low stone bridge which crosses the moat is but a single span; there are two doorways, the inner one curiously carved and fitted with strange wooden locks and bolts; a little loop-hole enabled the folk inside to converse with a stranger without giving him admittance. In the great hall and the ball-room are fine oak floors, decorated fireplaces, and much ornamentation, and on some of the windows are lines, scratched in times long ago by the diamond rings of the Moretons' friends. This is one of them—

Man can noe more
know weomen's mind
by kaire
Then by her shadow
hide ye what clothes
Shee weare.

Then there is a fine kitchen and strange little bedrooms; a tiny chapel and a priest's hiding-place. Doorways and passages in out-of-the-way places would enable a fugitive to pass from

one part of the house to another, avoiding all the larger occupied rooms, and in one place a shaft led down to an underground passage that dives beneath the moat. Some time since this passage was traced for a considerable distance and was found to lead in the direction of the mound that I spoke about; no doubt there was here a secret exit.

The little single-storied oratory chapel is said to be the oldest part of the whole building; it has a flat panelled roof and is lighted by two windows, one pointed and the other square-headed. Services are held here on Saints' Days. In the great hall, a lofty and handsome room, elaborately carved dragons adorn the principals, and crests and coats of arms of the Moretons, the Brereton of Brereton, the house of Lancaster—for Moreton was under the Baronry of Halton—and of Queen Elizabeth decorate the panels and the fragmentary ancient glass. Tea and refreshments are served to cyclists and other visitors in the beautiful wainscoted boudoir by the caretaker Mrs. Dale, who boasts that she is a descendant of the "carpeder." Some of the Tudor and Jacobean furniture is most interesting and in good condition; the spice box in the kitchen, the oak table, and the pewter plate are worth careful attention, and the great kitchen fireplace could prepare food for more than the Hall could accommodate.

Strange to say there is but little history connected with this fine old Hall; tradition says that the gay Queen Elizabeth danced in the long gallery, which is 75 feet long and but 12 feet wide, but which makes up for its deficiency in width by its height of 17 feet. The figures of Fate and Fortune keep watch over either end of the gallery, and Justice and Mercy guard the retiring-room fireplace, over which the arms of Moreton are quartered with Macclesfield, for John de Moreton in the reign of Edward III. married Margaret de Macclesfield.

Some time since readers of the *Illustrated London News* will remember Miss Amelia B. Edwardes' "Lord Brackenbury"; Little Moreton Hall was the scene of her story.

Two miles north of Moreton, beyond the New Hall which stands in a large park, is the village of Astbury, with its quaint village green, half-timbered houses, and famous and beautiful old church. How old is Astbury? Who can say? But it is

Astbury.

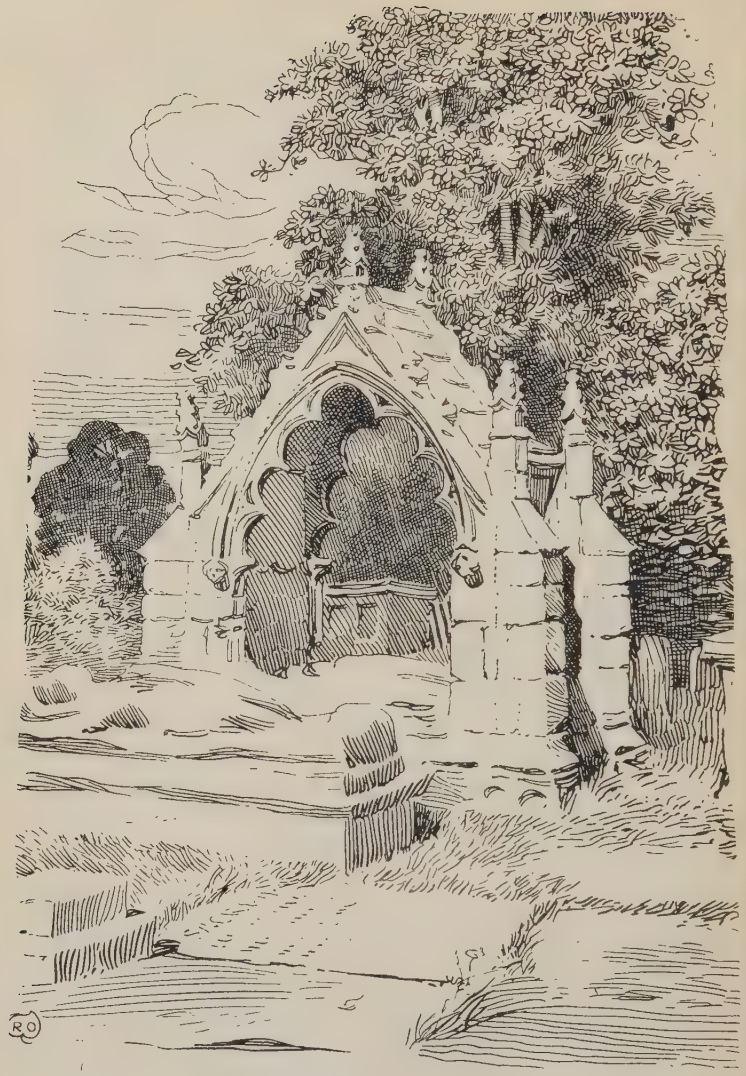
stated that the chancel dates back to about 1250, and perhaps stones of an earlier Norman church still exist; then about the end of the fourteenth century much of the present building was erected, the battlements and clerestory being added in

1493. Jacobean furniture and ceiling, a beautiful rood loft with a richly ornamented lantern pendant, which perhaps once contained a statuette, add interest to the interior. In the nave-clerestory there is a fresco displaying the arms of Henry VII. and a picture of the Virgin knighting St. George, and there are many memorials of Blundevilles, Wilbrahams, Shakerleys and others. The battered figure of a knight reclines beneath an ancient canopied tomb in the churchyard, and an inscription tells us that it is in memory of Sir Randolph Brereton. But Venables and Mainwarings have claimed this old knight as one of their ancestors, and Helsby, the able editor of Ormerod's *History*, considers that the inscription is not so old as the tomb, and that some Venables who lived five hundred years ago rests here beneath the sod. In very early days Astbury belonged to the mighty hunters, and after it had been given to the Abbey of St. Werburgh, Roger Venables, in 1259, tried hard to recover possession, but Providence, we are told, interposed and hastened his early death.

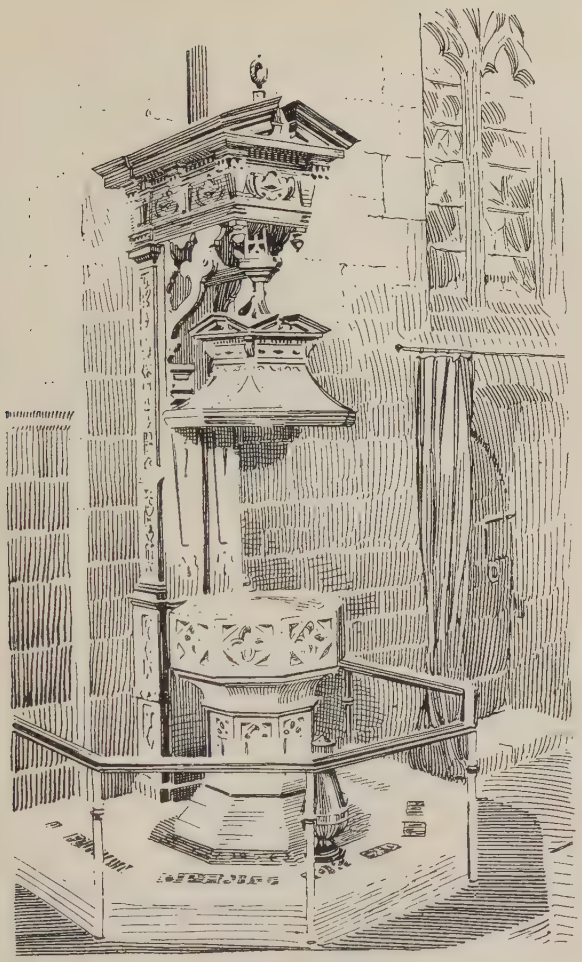
During the siege of Biddulph Hall, Brereton's Horse made Astbury their headquarters, stabling their steeds in the church, and objecting to the organ, they took it out and buried it in a field called the "Organ Close."

Let us not forget a much earlier event at Astbury, when two witnesses swore to the legal marriage of young William Stanley and Joan Bamville after that romantic elopement and ride from Wirral across the Cheshire plain.

There is yet time to visit a more ancient monument than Old Moreton or Astbury before entering the town of Congleton. Passing the church and the moated Peel Farm, I cross the canal, rise a hundred feet to Belle Vue, and then climb to the summit of Rainow Hill—mind this is not Rainow near Macclesfield. A dip and then another steep climb to the southern shoulder of Cloud End, where on, if not actually across the border, I find the Bride Stones on the edge of Biddulph Moor. The Staffordshire township I believe formerly claimed this antiquity,



The Old Grave, Astbury.



The Font, Astbury.

but since its enclosure it has been relegated to Buglawton. Wrapped in mystery the huge stones stand in a semicircle, commemorating rites or events forgotten before history was written. He who could tell the story of Stonehenge and Kit's Coty House could reveal something of the origin of these stones. There is a rude stone chest or enclosure within flat stones, and there is the tall upright; perhaps they were used in many an ancient forgotten rite, perhaps, as has been suggested, they were once the interior of a barrow; would that we could see back into the dim past and learn what our wild uncouth ancestors performed on this upland moor.

From close to the Bride Stones I look down upon two fair-sized sheets of water, both reservoirs; there is Rudyard in Staffordshire, almost two miles from end to end, and the smaller sheet at Bosley, both feeders for the canal. It takes me less time to drop round the end of the Cloud to Buglawton than it took me to climb up the Edge, though the road is not so good. Buglawton is now almost a part of Congleton. It has been a short but interesting day; I will not proceed further.

CHAPTER XV

CONGLETON TO GAWSWORTH

Congleton is a more modern town than some of the others I have visited. I do not mean that as a borough it has not as great antiquity, but it has lost nearly all its tumble-down, half-timbered buildings, and when it was a thriving silk town, sharing prosperity with Macclesfield, there was a great deal of building; it is not so interesting to the antiquarian as Sandbach, Nantwich, or Malpas. In the town hall, a fine modern building with an imposing clock tower, we may find a curious relic of Congleton, a broad leather belt adorned with big metal bells, which are known as St. Peter's Chains. At the feast of the church, "St. Peter ad Vincula," it was customary for the priests to parade in this belt, rattling the chains or chiming the bells, whichever you like to call it. At the Reformation these chains passed into the hands of a family of chimney-sweeps, who for three hundred years held hereditary possession, claiming the right to make a noise with them on the feast day. They perambulated the town, followed by a noisy crowd, chanting a proclamation which ended in an admonition to the Congletonians to get as drunk as possible during Wakes week. Now it so happened that the line of possession became duplicated, and instead of going to law the rival claimants attempted to settle the dispute in a more ancient fashion; thus every Wakes there was a fine set-to between the

two families of sweeps and their several followers, and the guardians of the peace were unable to cope with the annual difficulty. At last the town clerk wisely settled the dispute by compensating each party with a gift of ten shillings, and at the same time gaining possession of the chains; the trouble was stopped, and now the belt and bells are retained as a curiosity, and the peace of Congleton is no longer upset by drunken rows. Another old custom which continued certainly until the eighties was the ringing of the Pancake Bell at this same church of St. Peter on Shrove Tuesday. At eleven o'clock the bell pealed forth—a signal that it was time to prepare for dinner.

> And the housekeeper goes to the huxter's shop,
> And the eggs are brought home, and there's flop! flop! flop!
> And there's batter, and butter, and savoury smell,
> While merrily rings the Pancake Bell.

There is a "Bear's Head" and a "White Bear Inn" in Congleton, for the town is for ever associated with the pastime of bear-baiting. Even now the inhabitants of neighbouring towns and villages will talk of the people of Congleton as "bears," though the old Cheshire saying, "Congleton Rare, Congleton Rare, Sold the Church Bible to buy a new Bear!" is almost obsolete. There is some foundation for this accusation, for it seems that late in the seventeenth century the pious folk of the town considered that a new bear was more desirable than a new Bible. The Church Bible had got out of repair—we hope with constant use—and a sum of money was laid aside for the purchase of a new one; but unfortunately the Town Bear—a very important member of the Congleton Corporation—took ill and died, and the authorities considered that the public demand would be in favour of a fresh bruin rather than a fresh book; so the money was delivered to the bear-ward and the minister had to wait. Probably he consoled himself by watching the exciting frays; maybe he entered his own dog in the contests.

There are some tragic stories of Congleton. Few of these

towns escaped the ravages of plague, and in 1641 there commenced a two years' epidemic that desolated many a home in Congleton. "Lancashire Bess," the woman who bravely acted as nurse in the shanties erected for the accommodation of the stricken people, is almost forgotten; but from the little which history tells us it seems that Congleton, and Lancashire

Congleton.

from whence she came, may well be proud of the nurse. It was during one of these scourges that an old man played a grim joke on the town authorities; he told them he would tie a rope to his leg so that when the end came they might drag him out without fear of infection. When all was still in his house they hauled on the projecting end of the rope but no corpse came, and after almost pulling the house down in their endeavours

they discovered that the other end was securely bound to one of the main timbers.

Margaret Ward was another woman Congleton ought to be proud of; she was one of those martyrs whom Foxe failed to honour; she suffered a cruel death under the persecution of Elizabeth, remaining firm to the end in the Roman Catholic faith.

Like most other Cheshire towns Congleton possessed a brank to keep the tongues of unruly women in order. The last time it was used, however, it seems to have failed. The churchwardens, aided by the constables, were touring the town during divine service to see that all the public houses were empty, when they met a woman named Ann Runcorn who gave them such a wordy dressing down that they resolved to silence her with the brank. She was accordingly paraded in the uncomfortable and ignominious headgear, but directly it was taken off she turned and exclaimed:—"I'll be d——d if I won't do it again the next time I see you going round, for you deserve more than I have given you, and I'll do it again."

A little way north from Congleton is the Cheshire "deserted village." On the Macclesfield road, a mile from the town, a narrow lane turns to the right and dips down a steep incline to the river Dane; there is a warning notice to cyclists, as the hill is steep and it would be no unlikely thing for a rider who lost control of his machine to clear the little bridge at the bottom and take an unwelcome bath in the pretty stream, for the Dane here is very picturesque. Arriving at the bridge one is surprised to find that the deserted village is apparently lighted by electricity, and that a new brass plate adorns the doorway of the cigar factory of Havanna. But beyond and to the right of the little factory are rows of empty cottages and the ruins of the silk-mill, for the workmen of which the village was built about 1761, when the capture of the capital of Cuba gave origin to the name. It is strange to see the long, grass-grown street, with the boarded-up or broken windows of the

houses looking out on desolation, and the gardens behind choked with weeds, blackberries fighting for air with the feral raspberries and other garden plants. On the hill I meet an old man, shaky from age and, I fear, other causes, who gives me more or less inaccurate information about his village. He is the caretaker of the mill, but why the ruin needs a caretaker I know not. Two hundred and fifty years ago, he says, they made "baccy" here before the silk-mill was opened, and now though the mill has been closed for more than twenty years the old trade has come again to the town of cigars; this is doubtless an error, the cigar factory is but three or four years old and the place was chosen because the name was enticing and the water-power was good. Real Havanna cigars are now manufactured here!

Leaving the desolate but beautiful little dell, I return to Congleton, pass through the town on the left bank of the Dane, along the Holmes Chapel road, and reach the extensive park of Somerford, the home of the Shakerleys, which for some two miles borders the river. The Dane valley is in many places beautiful, and nowhere, save perhaps near its source, is it more charming than here, for the well-timbered, undulating park rises from the river's bank. Looking over the high wall I see a number of white cattle; these deserve especial notice, for they are the only remaining Cheshire herd of the white park cattle, so long considered to be the descendants of the old English wild cattle. Recent investigations have shown that it is probable that these "wild" cattle were simply white beasts introduced at a remote period—very likely from Italy by the Romans—which had been allowed to roam wild in the forests, until in later years they were emparked by the different monasteries. Most likely this herd came from Middleton in Lancashire, but it is by no means certain; they may have been at Somerford since the park was enclosed. There were some forty beasts here in the nineties; they are all polled or hornless, but at that time there was one wild heifer which was adorned with the graceful

curving horns of the typical park cow, similar indeed to the horns of the famous herd at Chillingham. They are milked regularly, and consequently do not behave in the same nervous manner as the members of other herds. Erratically marked calves are not weeded out in the unwise way which is practised elsewhere; consequently many of the cows are not pure white, but show a considerable amount of black in addition to the black points which are usually accepted as natural to the park breed—the ears, hoofs, horn-tips and muzzles. Twenty-four quarts of milk per day is not an unusual average for these cows, and I can testify to the excellence of both their milk and the butter made therefrom. About 180 acres of the park is apportioned off for the use of these interesting and beautiful animals. In hot weather the whole herd will sometimes gallop to a pond in their enclosure and enter the water till little but their heads remains visible, a characteristic of cattle in all hot countries, but seldom noticed amongst the staid Cheshire dairy cows.

Opposite the lodge a road runs in the direction of Brereton, and away in the hollow on the left there is a clump of trees surrounding a small, rush-grown pool, all that is left of the once famous Bagmere. Camden and others tell of this pool, for here, when an heir of the house of Brereton was doomed to die, stocks of trees rose to the surface and floated. How the poor lad must have shivered when news was brought him that the trees were swimming on Bagmere, he might well be expected to sink beneath the very fright, for there was then no hope for him. Brereton has changed hands and the pool is drained, but the old tradition is remembered, for ages of superstitious writers have kept its memory green. Good old Thomas Fuller, perhaps a little sceptical of the truth of the omen, nevertheless draws from it a moral. "If so, let all men look for so solemn summons to pay their debt to Nature. God grant us that gray hairs, dimness of sight, dulness of other senses, decay in general strength, death of our dearest

relations (especially when far younger than ourselves) before our eyes, etc., may serve us (instead of swimming logs) and be sanctified unto us, for sufficient and effectual monitors of our mortality!"

Bagmere Bank is a little semi-private road which leads right to Brereton-cum-Smethwick Church, behind which stands the fine old Hall of Brereton itself. This is not one of the many timbered mansions but is a stately brick building, adorned with turrets and handsome bays. It was built in 1586, and a story says that Queen Elizabeth laid the foundation stone; this is just as unlikely as the other story about the house which declares that it is Washington Irving's famous Bracebridge Hall. It is quite possible that Irving saw Brereton and admired it, and that the name Bracebridge occurred to him, for a famous family of that name occupied the Hall in the early days of the nineteenth century, but there is nothing in the tale that could lead one to say that the two halls are identical. Lord Brereton, who built the house, was evidently a most careful housekeeper; he kept a strict set of rules for his servants, with a routine of dishes for each day's table. One day a message came that a neighbouring titled gentleman was coming to dinner; Lord Brereton sent for his cook, inquired what there was for dinner, and then gave instructions that another turnip should be put in the pot. Lord Brereton was a founder of the Royal Society and a man of great ability; he built the Hall about the same time that his father-in-law, Sir John Savage, was erecting the mansion at Rock Savage. There is a vast difference between this grand house at Brereton and the few ruined walls which remain on the border of the Weaver.

The "Bear's Head" at Brereton Green is a most picturesque old hostelry; so indeed is all the little village that clusters by the highway side around the Green close to the park gates; it is a tempting place to stay and enjoy a country meal, and a very good meal I get. Round by Brereton mill-pond a lane leads across to Sandlow Green, and then turning again towards

Brereton Hall.

Somerford I reach Davenport House, where another lane passes through the woods, past the old long, low irregular building of Davenport Hall to a bridge over the river. The great Davenport family is now scattered far and wide through Cheshire; all the old houses in this district are connected with the family which wears for its crest a felon's head haltered, for the Davenports were master-foresters of the vast forest of Macclesfield.

Swettenham, with its venerable church, is an out-of-the-world village which is little visited, and beyond it is Kermincham, where there was one of the halls of the Mainwarings; on the other side of the road, somewhat back but well within sight, I see the half-timbered gables of Welltrough Hall, where a Davenport resided in the reign of Edward III., though, needless to state, not in the present building.

At the corner at Dicklow Cob, where the road crosses Redlion Brook, I take the left-hand way through Withington Green to Badger Bank, where a steep wooded hill rises above the Dingle Brook. Well may this be called Badger Bank, it is just the place to find a badger; and indeed this rare animal still exists in the thicker woods of this part of the county. This is again a fine stretch of road, shaded by magnificent old oaks and beeches growing in the parks of Withington and Astle, the latter a favourite resort of the badger under the passive protection of Colonel Dixon, for though he does not actually encourage the animal he will not suffer it to be exterminated. Just beyond the church, after crossing the brook which feeds Astle Pool, a spot where the waterhens are always perambulating, I turn to the right at Chelford post office—the village itself is beyond the railway bridge—and ride eastward to Monk's Heath, once a portion of the estates of the Staffordshire Abbey of Dieulacres, where stands the rest-house, once an inn bearing the sign of the "Iron Gates" of Alderley.

The Liverpool Mail had pulled up at the doors of the inn one day in 1807, and the sweating horses which had brought

the coach at no mean pace from Congleton had just been taken out when the music of Sir Peter Warburton's famous hounds was heard across the fields. Up went the ears of the horses; they scented the battle from afar, and before hostler or driver could stop them they were away over the fields in full cry with all their harness and trappings clanking on their flanks. One, a blood mare, kept pace with the whipper-in, clearing every hedge and ditch, "and gallantly followed him for about two hours." When at last Reynard was run to earth the horses were captured and led back to Monk's Heath, from whence the same evening they performed the stage to Congleton as if nothing had happened.

At Monk's Heath I again change my direction, turning once more towards Congleton. No place in Cheshire is so deservedly famous for its whitethorns as the park of Capesthorne; in May the trees are covered with bloom as if there had been a summer snowstorm; and they are fine trees too, these thorns, full of flower in spring and haws for the birds in winter. Capesthorne is the seat of the Bromley-Davenports, the present representatives of the family who for centuries held the right of life and death over all transgressors in the forest of Macclesfield. They reaped a rich harvest out of the robbers and outlaws, though the fees seem somewhat small nowadays; two shillings and a salmon for a master robber and one shilling per head for inferior thieves. But then there were other perquisites. Much of the property of the delinquent passed into their hands, and they also claimed the goods of suicides. It must have been a temptation to drive the poor hinds to put an end to themselves, and no doubt under the outrageous game-laws in Norman days this little play was occasionally resorted to. Then there were deodands, and very curious some of these were; a bell was claimed which had rolled upon a man at Presbury, and two gravestones which had proved too heavy for the sexton's welfare, and even a portion —only a portion—of a wheel at Adlington which had been

guilty of killing some one who had foolishly got underneath it. One wonders what the master-forester did with the bell and the bit of cart-wheel; the gravestones would no doubt come in very handy.

The Davenports' crest—the dolant felon with a rope round his neck—has given rise to much controversy. It has been suggested that it originated after a battle in the Wars of the Roses, when a Davenport who had been defeated was allowed his life on condition that he and his heirs should for ever own his defeat by wearing the crest; while another story says that one of the family stole an heiress, and by way of punishment had to walk three times round the gallows with the noose round his neck. Heiress-stealing was not uncommon, and there are many recorded lawsuits about small matters of this kind, but the punishment generally consisted of a fine, unless the relations of the damsel dealt it out without going to law, in which case it was prompt and sure—terms were not even offered. It seems far more likely that the crest—a somewhat gruesome one—is simply indicative of the penal rights enjoyed by the hereditary foresters.

Redes Mere is a fine artificial sheet of water lying on the opposite side of the road to Capesthorne; it comes in sight at the corner where the great beeches overhang. There is a floating island here and sundry other attractions which make it a favourite place of resort for cyclists in summer, while the lethargic bream brings scores of ardent piscators from Manchester, Macclesfield, and other haunts of coarse-fish anglers.

A little beyond the Mere is Siddington, where the black and white church with its little tower stands above the road on the left. At first sight Siddington Church looks very ancient, and so it is in a sense, but on closer inspection it will be found that it is painted brick, representing the old wattle and daub, and nothing save the chancel is timbered. One authority says

that none of the exterior is older than late Tudor. The screen inside, however, is early fourteenth-century work.

Not quite two miles further there is a real old church — very similar in appearance—which, though restored and altered, still contains much of the original fourteenth-century timber, especially some massive oak beams which support the little

Marton Church.

wooden tower. Marton was another home of the Davenports and two mutilated effigies lie in the tower which are supposed to have rested above the graves of Sir John and Sir Vivyan Davenport. When the church was restored some unsightly brickwork was removed, and timber, closely resembling the original, was substituted. These little shingle-covered stumpy

spires are rather effective and give a very ancient character to the building, but the best way to realise the age is to step inside the porch and examine the beams that support the west end. The remains of a cross stand in the churchyard, and some very old stained glass decorates the windows.

Just down the lane by the inn is the Marton Oak, a forest veteran, which is not exactly on its last legs for it is shored up and crutched to prevent total dissolution. Thirty years ago this venerable tree was in a much healthier condition than it is to-day, and it then measured 14 feet in diameter three feet above the ground, and was 71 feet 10 inches in circumference. Never a lofty tree, all its energies have apparently run to width; at that time it was only 30 feet high. Though still alive it has suffered grievous internal decay, and in fact no longer has any internals. A gentleman who lived in the neighbourhood remembers when there was only a small hollow in the trunk, and then a few geese were housed in it; when this gaping wound grew it was converted into a shippen for a bull, and afterwards ploughs and farm implements were stored in the natural outhouse. Now, it is open at the top to all the storms of heaven, so that nothing of any delicacy can be kept within its bosom. Poor old tree! It has seen many vicissitudes and has done its best to be useful, but its days are numbered and I doubt if the next generation will know the Marton Oak, which bears the reputation—one that is claimed, however, by many another tree—of being the largest oak in England.

I wonder which will go first, Marton Oak or Marton Hall? Naturally the Bromley-Davenports do not want to destroy the ancient workmanship of their ancestral home and they are no doubt puzzled how to preserve it. Even now the plaster is falling away and the crossed laths or wattles show in many places—unsightly, perhaps, but better than some of the modern brickwork. It is a grand timber and plaster hall of the real old sort, and looks fine from the roadway; when one

approaches near, the signs of decay are however evident. In the hall—now the kitchen—are some huge spears, one of them quite fourteen feet long. Were these used by the foresters? The drawing-room is a beautifully panelled room decorated with a carved fireplace bearing the crest of the family and furnished with Jacobean furniture; and on the staircase is a neatly carved and well-hung dog-gate. This, I think, more than anything else in the Hall, brings to my mind a picture of

Marton Hall.

the old days when the many dogs wandered freely in the paved hall or slumbered at the foot of the oak staircase, permitted anywhere but in the upper rooms. At the back of the Hall is a great hollow where was the mill-pond, which, like Marton Mere, is now drained.

A lane almost opposite the Hall leads across to Cheney Gate at Rodeheath, where turning to the left I ride to Gawsworth. It is difficult to know what to say about Gawsworth,

for it is a most interesting spot closed to the public. As I approach the church I see on the gateway of the fine old half-timbered parsonage a warning notice, and on the church-gate another *cave*, which certainly says that the keys may be obtained for the church, but under such conditions that I decide to do without them. Elsewhere I have dealt with the question of shutting up these ancient spots, and I am quite in sympathy with restrictions where there is reason. If people, especially cyclists, will not respect other people's property they deserve to be shut out, and unfortunately they have so deserved in some places, notably Tabley and Arley; but there are ways in which this privacy can be obtained without insulting everybody. Apparently the road to Gawsworth is sacred, for there is a policeman, as I approach, patrolling in front of the vicarage; does he think I want to steal it? When I stop at the gate, simply to admire the old building, he looks at me as if I was committing a felony; but a cat may look at a king, and even a layman at a vicarage! There was once a time when a vicar lived here who delighted to show the beauties of the house he lived in, and I have been in vicarage, hall, and church; that time is past. Readers of such a book as this are not the people who will give offence, but at the same time they can help to discountenance rowdyism and vulgarity, and may do much to remove the slur cast upon the characters of cyclists in general. The owners of many a venerable building or other antiquity are justly proud of their family property and it behoves us all to treat these heirlooms with respect, and especially not to hurt other people's feelings by indifference to or irreverence in places of worship. The churches of our land should be free to all, and should be rightly treated by all, and it is very hard on those who do care about these relics and who would behave with decorum that they should be kept out by restrictions which are little short of insults.

Gawsworth, however, should not be missed; it is such a

quaint little village, standing just off the high-road. First there is the church on the right, with its tower decorated with heraldic shields, and with the effigies and memorials to the Fittons inside, one of which is especially interesting—the cloaked and hooded figure of the seated Dame Alice, which, like many other early seventeenth-century monuments, has once been highly coloured. There is a boss on the porch representing a Tudor rose, from amongst whose petals peep two faces; it is supposed to commemorate the happy union of the rival houses of York and Lancaster. Sir Thomas Fitton was a strong Lancastrian, and Gawsworth might well be glad when the Wars of the Roses were ended, for when Lord Audley and the Prince of Wales were defeated at Blore Heath, thirty-one out of the sixty-six tenants of Sir Thomas were slain. Sir Thomas, who survived, was known as "the Fighting Fitton," and he was by no means the only one of the family who deserved this title. On one of these tombs is the pun, which would not be worth repeating were it not so old, that the family are "Fittons to weare a heavenly diadem."

In front of the church, by the roadside, are some fish-ponds where sundry ducks disport themselves, amongst them a pretty little pinioned drake widgeon; there is also a fine grove of those clean-looking walnut-trees. Just beyond, some-way back from the road, is the old Hall where the Fittons and after them the Mainwarings lived. It is in the half-timber of Cheshire, as is also the vicarage across the way; both are beautiful old places. Often has the question been asked, was Lady Mary Fitton, the beautiful but frail maid of honour of Queen Elizabeth, the Dark Lady of Shakespeare's sonnets? It can hardly be answered; but that lady lived in yonder house; she was famous in her day, though of little credit to the family.

Above the doorway of the vicarage is the inscription:—"Syr Edward Fyton, knight, with My lady Mare ffyton hys wyffe," but this does not refer to the builder, who was the

rector, George Baguley; in fact, this panel is younger than the parsonage, and was found hidden away amongst lumber in a loft. Perhaps the most famous vicar of Gawsworth was Henry Newcome, who when he first came found the doors locked against him, for the lively gentry of the neighbourhood did not wish to be preached at. However, Newcome got round them, and won their regard, and even affection. He cannot have been a very austere man, for he himself admits that "when the gentlewomen from the hall used to come to see us, I was very merry with they, and used to charge a pistol I had, and to

Gawsworth Vicarage.

shoot it off to affright them;" and when in 1657 he moved to Manchester—from whence he was subsequently ejected—he was "sadly affected and broken all to pieces." Newcome pointed and repaired the old vicarage, but he had not a very good time here, for he admits that he was frequently in debt. Two years after Newcome came there was a visitor of note at the Hall, Elias Ashmole, founder of the museum that bears his name in Oxford. From here he made a journey into the Peak, collecting plants and other curiosities.

In front of the Hall is a curious pleasure-ground which is known by the name of the Tilt-yard. There seems some doubt

if that was the real use of this open space, which is 200 yards long by 65 wide, and has a steep bank on three sides that would serve as a grand stand, and a mound at the end for the tent of the Queen of Beauty.

Above the door of the old Hall are the arms of the Fittons, the motto "Fit onus leve," and an inscription in memory of Sir Edward Fitton, who was Queen Elizabeth's Lord President of Connaught and Thomond; the date is 1570, nine years before his death. His son, Sir Edward, was an ardent Royalist, and fought at Edgehill and Banbury for his king. There is an amusing entry in the Corporation accounts of Congleton of 3s. 4d. paid for "wine gave to Colonel Fitton, not to quarter 500 soldiers in the town." We conclude that it was his pity for the inhabitants, and not this enormous bribe, that made him refrain.

There is another Hall at Gawsworth, now belonging to the Earl of Haddington. It was built by Lord Mohun, and is a plain brick building, standing at the bend of the road.

No mention of Gawsworth would be complete without some allusion to the great Cheshire Will Case. This, however, was not a single case that can be stated off-hand. It was a most complicated series of legal actions, in which forgery, illegal imprisonments, seduction, and divorce were but side issues. The whole arose from the fact that Sir Edward, the last in succession, left no heir, and the property passed to his sisters, Penelope, wife of Sir Charles Gerard; Ann, wife of Sir John Brereton; Jane, wife of Thomas Minshull; and Frances, wife of Harry Mainwaring. Then William Fitton, nephew of Sir Edward, laid claim to the estate, while his son Alexander obtained three verdicts in his favour, and took possession. Nineteen years after the death of Sir Edward, Lord Gerard, son of Sir Charles Gerard, one of Charles II.'s favourites, produced a will purporting to be made in his favour by Sir Edward, and when Alexander pleaded the deed poll he produced a man named Abraham Grainger, who swore that he had

forged the deed under a threat of mortal violence. Witnesses also said that Fitton had paid Grainger £40 for the forgery. Then Grainger confessed that he had lied, "which business," says Pepys, "is the foulest against my Lord Gerard that ever anything in the world was." Alexander was fined heavily and sent to prison, but was released by James II. and had honours showered upon him, being created, amongst other titles, Lord Gawsworth. Charles, Baron of Brandon, Lord Gerard, died in possession of the estates, though it was not cleared up whether Grainger's first or last assertion was correct. Then came the side issue of the case that followed the birth of the poet Savage, a nasty business in which Earl Rivers and the wife of Charles Gerard, son of Lord Gerard, were implicated. And so case followed case, till the original causes were forgotten, and it has been hinted, not without reason, that political issues were even more at stake than the ownership of the land.

Half a century later came the final quarrel between the husbands of two heiresses of the Gerard estates, the Duke of Hamilton and Lord Mohun. It arose out of a paltry quarrel, which Thackeray in *Esmond* hints broadly was a political ruse to put the duke out of the way. It was a double duel in which the seconds, Colonel Hamilton and General Macartney, took part. Thackeray makes it a threefold brawl, a regular scrimmage to the death in which no rules of combat were observed. Be that as it may, Duke Hamilton slew the "bloody Mohun," a man of many affairs of honour. During the confusion when Mohun fell, Macartney, reaching over the shoulder of the colonel, stabbed the duke, who was bending over his fallen opponent. So ended the two last litigants, and Gawsworth at last found peace in other hands.

Lady Mohun married again. We have an insight into the state of affairs when, as the wife of the Hon. Charles Mordaunt, she had dried her tears. In the letters from Mrs. Bradshaw to Mrs. Howard, afterwards Countess of Suffolk, there are

some interesting references to "Gosworth," where Mrs. Bradshaw was in service.

On the birthday of George I. she writes: "Our bells have rung ever since four this morning, which is more a proof of Lady Mohun's power than the people's inclination," for the good folk of Gawsworth were staunch Jacobites.

"We meet in the work-room," she says, describing the day, "before nine; eat, and break a joke or two, till twelve; then we repair to our own chambers and make ourselves ready, for it cannot be called dressing; at noon the great bell fetches us into a parlour, adorned with all sorts of fire-arms, poisoned darts, several pairs of old shoes and boots won from the Tartars by men of might belonging to this castle, with the stirrups of King Charles I. taken from him at Edge-Hill.

"Here leave we the historical part of the furniture, and cast your eye (in imagination) upon a table covered with good fish and flesh, the product of our own estate; and such ale! It would make you stare again, Howard. After your health has gone round (which is always the second glass), we begin to grow witty, and really say things that would make your ears tingle; your court wits are nothing to us for invention (plots only excepted); but, being all of a side, we lay no scheme but of getting you amongst us, where, though I say it that should not (because I would have my share in it), you would pass your time very agreeably in our dyke, for you must know we have hardly seen dry land since we came."

In a later letter she says, "They call it six miles from us, I believe it twelve; and cursed roads, as all Cheshire is: if one could fly in the air, it would be a charming country."

Leaving Gawsworth, its memories of lawsuits and country life two hundred years ago, I ride a short way up the hill, and stop at the little wood at the corner of the road, where on the map is the one word "Grave." The grave is a couple of simple flat stones, one of them raised on a setting of brick,

and on it I read the words, much disfigured by weather, and no doubt by thoughtless picnickers sitting upon the tomb to eat their sandwiches—

Maggoty Johnson's Grave.

Under this stone
Rest the remains of Mr. Samuel Johnson,
afterwards ennobled with the grander title of
Lord Flame,
who, after being in his life distinct from other Men
By the Eccentricities of his Genius,
Chose to retain the same character after his Death,
And was, at his own Desire, buried here, May 5th,
A.D. MDCCLXXIII, Aged 82.

Stay thou whom Chance directs, or Ease persuades,
To seek the Quiet of these Sylvan shades.

Here, undisturbed and hid from Vulgar Eyes,
A Wit, Musician, Poet, Player, lies.
A Dancing Master too, in Grace he shone,
And all the arts of Op'ra were his own :
In Comedy well skill'd, He drew Lord Flame,
Acted the Part, and gain'd himself the Name ;
Averse to Strife, how oft he'd gravely say
These peaceful Groves should shade his breathless Clay ;
That when he rose again, laid here alone,
No friend and he should quarrel for a Bone ;
Thinking that were some old lame Gossip nigh,
She possibly might take his Leg or Thigh.

Very likely the wit of Lord Flame had something to do with the tingling ears of the convivial gatherings in Gawsworth Hall, for he visited with all the country gentry when he was not acting in London. And here his bones lie, and I notice that some foolish people have attempted to get a leg or a thigh, for they have been rooting at the bricks round the tomb, as if they imagined that he only lay an inch or two below the surface. Well old Maggotty Johnson, as they call you hereabouts, you have chosen a pleasant place to lie in, and methinks it is more peaceful to slumber out in the woods where the brown leaves of autumn make a fresh pall each year, and where the first willow wren will warble from the gray old birch, and the winter robin sing cheerfully from the holly.

CHAPTER XVI

MACCLESFIELD AND ALDERLEY

When we join the high road close to the cross at Warren, the last remains of the once extensive Danes Moss are visible on the right; then gradually a suburban element becomes noticeable, until we enter the streets of busy Macclesfield.

Macclesfield is on the foothills of the Peak; steep hilly streets lead from the lower part of the town to the upper and better portions; and nowhere, perhaps, are these hills steeper than close to the church of St. Michael — *the* church of Macclesfield. On one side a long flight of steps ascends to the market-place, a fine open space, while on the other a hill like the side of a house is more used for descent than ascent. From its elevated position the fine square tower of the church is a prominent object from all around, though there are many spires and towers of places of worship and public buildings in this thriving town. Macclesfield church is not very ancient, that is to say, so far as the present building is concerned; it was almost rebuilt in the middle of the eighteenth century, and a few years since further restoration was undertaken, though old stones were retained in their original places wherever possible. This system of renovation gives a peculiar spotted appearance to the building, and nowhere is this more marked than on the Savage Chapel, a most interesting antiquity which had been terribly neglected for many, many generations.

At last the authorities have moved, and once more the Savage Chapel, built by Thomas Savage, Archbishop of York, is kept in order and repair.

Macclesfield.

Four carved stone shields decorate the doorway of the Savage Chapel, though it is somewhat difficult to decipher their armorial signs; they represent the arms of Savage, and of the sees of London, Rochester, and York, the three bishop-

rics over which the founder presided. Within are the monuments of many of the illustrious house of Savage,—men who fought at Boulogne, Bosworth, and elsewhere in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries,—men whose feet rest upon the lion, and whose heads are pillowed on the unicorn crest of the family. Some of them lie beside the effigies of their wives, armoured knights by quaintly decked dames; some are beneath elaborate canopies, and armorial shields and decorative panels adorn their altar tombs. Most noticeable of all, perhaps, are Sir John and his lady, Elizabeth, who recline on a tomb against the west wall; he built that stately building, now but a ruined wall; he was the great Savage of the Rock. The alabaster figures were originally gilded, and rich painting covered the lofty circular arch which stretches above them; but in some retrograde age, either for spite or with the idea of preserving the beauty of the stone, they were blackleaded. I do not know if both knight and lady were thus treated, but to-day only the daughter of the Earl of Rutland and some of the tomb ornaments retain traces of the disfiguring sable pall.

It is said that the heart of the founder lies in the chapel according to his request; his body rests at York. Until quite recently the chapel was shut off from the church by a wooden screen; now it is separated only by an open stone screen; on it lie two of the effigies. Just outside is another tomb, whereon half-reclining and resting on one arm is the effigy of Thomas, Earl Rivers, last of the illustrious house, who died in 1694, a striking figure, in loose flowing robes and a large wig. On the south side there are two recesses which at one time, according to Randle Holme, contained figures of two other Savages, but they are lost. One niche remains empty, but in the other lies a man dressed in a gown, across whose body is what appears to be a square stone block; this effigy was moved from its position against one of the walls, and on this block was either a pillar or a buttress of the wall. Earwaker thinks this gentleman was one of the Liversage family,

his evidence being the coat of arms; but the custodian who shows me round declares that it represents William Legh, an early master of the Macclesfield Grammar School, who was buried here in 1630. The painted portrait of Sir John Percyvale, founder of this self-same school, adorns the wall in one place, and near it is a most curious brass, called the Legh Pardon Brass, which represents Pope Gregory bowing before the vision of the Saviour rising from the consecrated bread, while Roger Legh and his six sons on the right offer up their five paternosters and five aves, for which they received twenty-six thousand years and twenty-six days' pardon. The brass is incomplete, only Roger remains, his wife and the seven daughters are gone.

On the other side of the chancel a Downes lies, but there is nothing but his crest to tell who he may be; quite recently a bit of an ancient oak pew, with the white hart of the Downes emblazoned on a panel, was discovered in the church; this now stands near the tower at the west end.

The Legh Chapel contains memorials of the house of Lyme. One of them is interesting; itself incorrect it has often been misquoted.

> Here lyeth the bodie of Perkin a Legh,
> That for King Richard the death did die,
> Betrayed for Righteovnes
> And the bones of Sir Peers his sonne,
> That with King Henrie the Fift did wonne,
> In Paris.

Then follows a tale of how this Perkin was at "Cressie," and Lyme was given him for his redoubtable service, and how Sir Piers fought and fell at Agincourt. "In their memorie Sir Peter Legh of Lyme Knight descended from them fynding the sayd ould verses written uppon a stone in this Chappell did re-edifie this place, Ano Dni 1620." But it was not Perkin who won Lyme by his service, but Sir Thomas D'Anyers,

his father-in-law, whose memorial is in the church at Grappenhall.

There is a story—need we doubt it?—that young Bradshaw, afterwards Lord President and regicide, when a boy at the Grammar School, scratched on a stone in this churchyard some strange prophetic lines:

> My brother Henry must heir the land,
> My brother Frank must be at his command:
> Whilst I, poor Jack, will do that
> That all the world will wonder at.

William Smith describes Macclesfield as "one of the fairest towns in Cheshire," and that was long before the days of its prosperity. It was Charles Roe who made Macclesfield; in 1756 he started a silk mill, and about the same time a smelting mill, where he manufactured brass with copper from the mines of Alderley and Mottram. He started in the button and twist trade, an ancient industry in the town, and then introduced the silk business, finally diverting his energies to the larger copper undertaking at Parys Mountain in Anglesea, which he discovered to be well worth exploiting. He it was who set up the first carriage in Macclesfield, "a chariot," in the year 1770, and Corry, writing in 1817, says—"Among other proofs of the increase in wealth, there are now ten coaches kept by opulent individuals in the town." And the silk trade grew, and Macclesfield became important; and the silk trade declined and Macclesfield became poor and needy. Then came a spurt in 1870, for the victorious German army was crippling the French trade, and competition for a time was at an end. The silk trade of Macclesfield once more flourished, and fortunes were made with amazing rapidity. Nowadays Macclesfield people talk with despair of those old days—not so long ago either—for once more a cloud of depression overshadows the place; yet the town leads, almost monopolises, the British silk industry, and though there are many croakers we

have only to look round at the municipal buildings and the suburban residences of the wealthy inhabitants to realise that Macclesfield is not yet on the verge of bankruptcy. There are of course other trades, and of late years the shirt trade and cotton business have employed a large number of the people. Macclesfield grumbles, but it has still a fair share of prosperity.

Old Macclesfield has vanished. The "Old Bate Hall," once the wattle-and-daub residence of the great Stopford family, has changed its character and its face: it is now a brick-fronted inn, which only keeps the name. The Town Well is gone; its inscription only remains, amongst other antiquities in the Public Park, and I have some difficulty in tracing the last bit of Macclesfield Castle, the home in the fourteenth century of John de Maxfield, and afterwards of the Staffords, Earls of Buckingham, and later still of the great Derbys. Even some of Cheshire's best historians speak of this fragmentary memorial as entirely lost, but through the kindness of the owners I am able to see, at the back of the premises of Mr. Halstead Cutts, the last bit of wall, the pointed arch, the square-headed window, and the fine groined archway, with one perfect boss, a rose, which are all that are left of Macclesfield Castle.

The town authorities of Macclesfield claimed the right of punishing offenders against the law in their own peculiar ways; they had their pillory and ducking stool, their stocks, whipping-post and cage; Gallows Field and Cookstool Hill are names which still remain. Then there was the famous brank or "brydle for a curste queane" which passed from mayor to mayor. The town stocks, most uncomfortable iron ones, stand now in the Park close to the remains of the old Market Cross, and three "mere stones" from the Forest; one of these ancient pillars stood for some time in Upton, where it was used as a gravestone for a favourite dog, and the other two were rescued from Wincle, where some unthinking farmer had converted them into gate stumps. The thirty-ton trap

boulder which was dug up in the town, and which now forms another curiosity of the Park, speaks of a far more ancient condition of Macclesfield. I was once in the town on "Barnaby Day," Macclesfield's famous June holiday; the silk-spinners and shirt-makers gazed in listless wonder at this big stone, and I heard one young man telling his sweetheart, with great gusto, how the stocks were employed to sober the unruly; there were many that day who would have been none the worse for an hour of doubtful ease.

According to Burghall the town authorities themselves sometimes needed the stocks or cage, for we learn from him of five aldermen who drank so much sack and *aqua vitæ* that three of them died next day. "Oh, that drunkards would learn to be wise!" exclaims the vicar of Acton. Town affairs were not managed very well at a much more recent date than this; in 1806 a prisoner was imprisoned for six months for a debt of 5s. 3d., and another languished for the same period for the sum of 9d. The gaoler kept a public-house, the sign of the "Eagle and Child"—was this the "Old Derby Arms" in Derby Street?—and got no salary, but appeared to live well upon unfortunates who could not pay their debts but had to pay him 3s. 6d. a week for his hospitality, for he was charged a rent of £26 for his prison-inn. The report adds that the dungeon was in ruins and six inches deep in mud; perhaps this was the alternative lodging for the debtors who could not find the weekly charge for attendance.

The bells were rung backward in Macclesfield when Bonnie Prince Charlie entered the town in 1745; this was not intentional, but the only four ringers who could be obtained were so terrified that they knew not what they were doing. In the front ranks of the advance guard of the Scottish cavalry was Sampson Salt, a Macclesfield man; he had gone forth as a spy and had been captured, and he rode, a trembling wretch, between four fierce Scotchmen, who cursed him roundly if he dared to glance to the right or

left. Then came old Glenbucket, doubled up with age on his horse, and the rest of the mounted troops on their sorry nags. After them were the wild Highlanders, all in their kilts save the Prince's bodyguard, and amongst them, in kilt, silver-trimmed blue waistcoat and jaunty blue bonnet, the Pretender himself; before him skirled the bagpipes. Charlie had walked from Manchester, and it was said from Carlisle, either for effect or to encourage his wild foot soldiers.

The townsfolk of Macclesfield were terribly upset, and when the Prince was proclaimed they had not spirit to cheer. The town was illuminated, but only because they feared the claymores and dirks, and they grudgingly fed the men who were billeted upon them, and pretended to make merry. In some of the houses as many as fifty were crowded, "men, women, and children lay promiscuously together like a kennel of hounds," and where officers were quartered, there was complaint that much private property was missing after they had left.

Poor Salt managed to escape from his rough guard and fled to the King's army, which was steadily approaching under the Duke of Cumberland. So shattered were his nerves that he was again arrested as a spy, for he could give no satisfactory account of himself; however he was released almost at once and returned to Macclesfield. Scarce a week later the disheartened rabble army was in full retreat towards their northern home, and when Salt heard that they were again approaching Macclesfield, his terror was so acute that he died before they appeared. Back into the town came the army, which had only got as far south as Derby, and now there was no illumination but much more damage done. The wild Highlanders only thought of getting back to Scotland, and carried with them anything that they wanted, and the officers even went to such trivial excesses as breaking looking-glasses in the rooms in which they spent the night. How the people wished them God-speed out of the town! So the army

passed northward to Manchester, where the advance guard was received with a shower of stones, though here but a few days before they had raised three hundred followers; so Cumberland arrived in Macclesfield close on their heels. Very different was his reception; the farmers seized their spades and dug up the barrels of beer they had buried: treating the English soldiers willingly; even those with Jacobite leanings were glad to see these trained disciplined men march with swinging tramp into the town. Three months later came the news that Culloden Moor had witnessed the final scene of this unfortunate rising, and that the remnant of that kilted army was in full retreat to the Highland "hills, and the caves, and the rocks."

A little west of Macclesfield is Broken Cross, close by the County Lunatic Asylum. This, a small collection of houses round an inn, at one time bore an unenviable reputation, for here lived a gang of pedlars known as the Broken Cross Gang, who were associated at fairs and country festivals with the men from Flash in Staffordshire. These men began as unlicensed hawkers, trading in buttons from Macclesfield, ribbons and ferretting from Leek, and Manchester handkerchiefs and small-wares. After a time they gave up giving ready money for their purchases of stock, and then they gave up paying altogether. Flash got a bad name, and rapidly degenerated into a sort of country thieves' quarter, until the Harpur family rooted the unprofitable tenants out. There is no record of the actual condition of things at Broken Cross, save that the gang took to thimblerigging, "playing with thimbles and buttons, like jugglers with cups and balls, and enticing people to lose their money by gambling," and later to open robbery and pocket-picking. It is rather suggestive that an inn at the corner of the road which leads to Bollington is called the "Flash." The slang or cant talk of these men was well-known, and a common slang term nowadays for bad money is "flash" coin.

Henbury cum Pexall comes next; it was here that some thirty years ago the lakes in front of the Hall burst their banks and flooded the surrounding country, doing some £4000 worth of damage. Mrs. Marsland, who was sued for damages, was exonerated from all blame, as it was ruled that the calamity was purely the act of God!

Turning to the right I pass on to Birtles, where is Whirley Hall, a square brick building. In front stands a single pillar of the old gate, which is still adorned with the Swettenham crest, a lion and birch tree, locally known as "the monkey and stick." Through Over Alderley, past Harehill, I enter the woods of Alderley Edge, and passing over Addermoss reach the "Wizard," where for a space I leave my machine. Alderley Edge is one of those outcrops of sandstone which break the monotony of the Cheshire plain; from north and east and west it stands a prominent object, a beautiful wooded hill—really all planted trees—on whose steep side the houses of Manchester merchants are clustered, not crowded but dotted amongst their surrounding trees.

The title of the "Wizard" is derived from the legend of the Edge. A farmer riding to Macclesfield to sell his white horse was accosted by a strange figure, a tall old man clad in a flowing garment, who offered to purchase the animal there and then. The farmer refused, thinking the price too small, whereupon the stranger told him he would not sell the horse in Macclesfield, and that if he would meet him at the same spot on his return, he would renew the offer. The farmer found no customer, and returned somewhat crestfallen, when he again met the old man. The wizard, for such the old man was, led him past the Seven Firs, the Golden Stone, and Stormy Point, to the Saddle Bole, where to his surprise he heard a horse neigh almost beneath his feet. Here the wizard stopped, struck the rock, and a great pair of Iron Gates, which the farmer had not noticed before, appeared and sprang open; then the

farmer under a spell was led into the cave, where he beheld a sight which his guide told him mortal man had ne'er seen before. Slumbering round the cavern were countless knights, and by their sides were tethered milk-white steeds, while in the innermost recesses of the rocky fastness were piles of treasure. From this heap of gold the farmer was paid, and the old man informed him that his horse was wanted to complete the number required by the sleeping warriors, and that some day, when England should be in dire distress from an invading force, the hidden warriors of the Edge would rise, descend upon the plain, and save the day for their country. Then the bewildered farmer was allowed to depart, and when once more safe beneath the clouds of evening, the wizard touched the gates; with a clang they closed and disappeared for ever.

It is not a new story, this Alderley legend, neither is it unique; throughout the British Isles, and in fact in many places on the Continent, there are similar folk-tales, not a few of them being connected with the Arthurian legends.

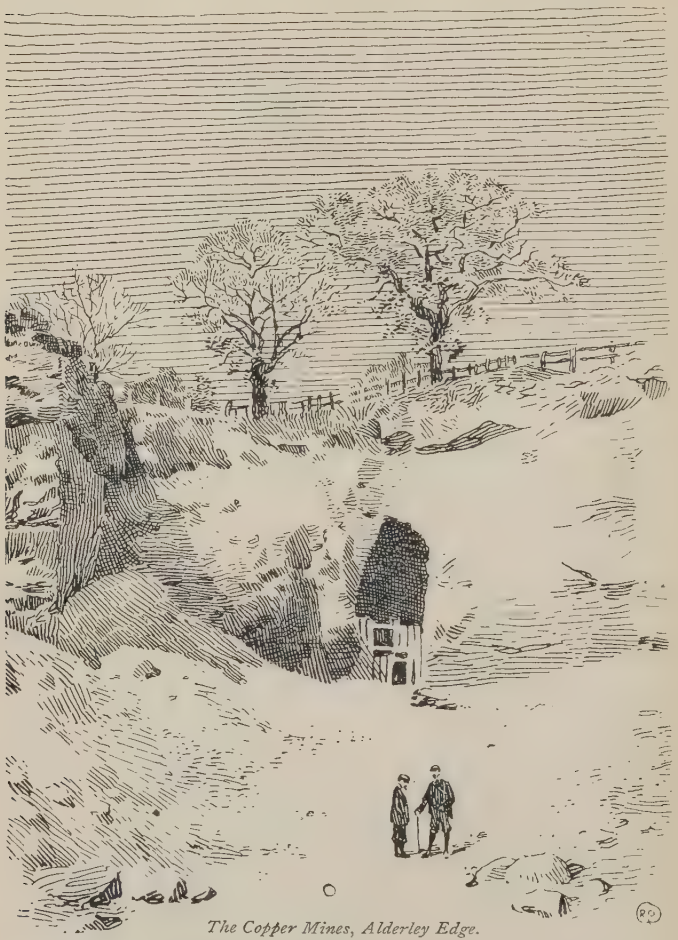
Strolling through the woods, I make my way to the highest point, where a square building with a pointed roof, the old beacon, stands, now hidden from the plain below by its encircling grove of trees. Webb speaks of the beacon as a prominent object, and long before Webb's time the Edge was a beacon hill; it is so marked on a map dated 1578. Early in the eighteenth century the beacon was but a hollow room wherein was kept an iron pot to hold combustibles, but before the next century dawned it had been altered and a sloping roof added, and when there was a possibility of trouble with France, when Napoleon's threatened invasion kept nervous folk on tenterhooks, the Duke of Gloucester climbed the Edge to see if the beacon was in a condition to be used. Four hundred feet above the plain, six hundred and more above sea-level, this beacon would have served to rouse the country round and would have passed the message from the Derbyshire hills

to Frodsham and Halton, and so across Lancashire to Gaunt's embattled pile.

Before 1640, about which time the great beech-wood was planted by Sir Thomas Stanley in Alderley Park, this sandstone upland was a heathy moor, but about the middle of the eighteenth century Scotch firs were introduced, and now the hill resembles a forest rather than a moor. The view from the Beacon on a clear day is very fine indeed; no wonder that the Edge is a popular resort for pleasure-seekers. In every direction we look over the plain, limited eastward by the heathery uplands of Derbyshire and the far-off Yorkshire hills; westward, in the dim distance, blue and hazy, are the Welsh mountains, and southward the high lands of Staffordshire, for the Potteries stand higher than this isolated rock. To the north there is no limit but the natural failure of eyesight to scan the distance, for the Lake hills are the first rising ground of any importance, and between us and them lies the whole length of Lancashire, and to the north-west, out beyond that silver streak, the Mersey estuary, is the faint blue of the Irish Sea.

Walking back, round a point, I see a curious shallow cave, which on entering I find is supported on sandstone pillars. Mr. Charles Roeder tries, I think without sufficient reason, to associate this strange artificial grotto with the Iron Gates; it certainly is not near the Bole, the spot indicated in most versions of the legend. Alderley Edge abounds in traces of ancient mining. Mr. Roeder has carefully investigated these signs of former industries, and, helped by Mr. F. S. Graves of Alderley, has thrown a great deal of light on the history of the Edge. Roman or even pre-Roman mining was evidently carried on, and some of the shafts are very old; older still are the curious surface-workings from which the rock was broken and pounded with stone hammers formed of boulders from the glacial clay. Flint knives and curious stone circles—do not, however, mix these with the pseudo-

Druidical circle near the beacon—and places where the ore



The Copper Mines, Alderley Edge.

was smelted have also been discovered, but many of the

traces of the earlier workings have been obliterated by subsequent attempts to procure the wished-for copper. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries various individuals and companies worked the mines with more or less success, the most noteworthy perhaps being the undertaking of Charles Roe of Macclesfield, which was discontinued when the more profitable Pary's Mountain was attacked. It was not until 1879 that the workings at Alderley were finally closed. Copper, cobalt, carbonate of lead, manganese, and iron are the minerals found at Alderley, but copper and cobalt are the ones which have proved most profitable.

A little below the "Wizard" is a huge spoil bank, near the mouth of the largest of the workings; now, works and spoil bank are desolate, and a few ruins here and there show where the miners lived. Perhaps we may be glad that the Edge is left unmolested by the searchers after wealth; it is more beautiful as it is. Those who have seen that desolated land at the north-east corner of the Isle of Anglesea cannot desire a similar blot on the Cheshire landscape.

Past Brindlow, where the first of the ancient stone hammers were discovered, the road, overshadowed by trees, drops rapidly towards the plain, joining the Monk's Heath or Congleton road at the old cross, which, by the way, stands there overgrown by a fine thorn-tree; a charming object in the roadway is this tree-shaded stump of a cross resting on its square pile of stones.

It is hardly out of my way to run from here to Old Alderley, which lies half a mile to the south. At the corner of the park wall, where the fruit-trees are carefully trained up the sheltering walls of the garden, stand two pillars of the terrace wall, and a small house—all that remains of the old Hall which was destroyed by fire. The present Hall is away in the park, near Radnor Mere, a fine secluded sheet of water, where the beeches planted two hundred and fifty years ago are a sight to behold. John Evelyn speaks of the value of beech leaves

as a substitute for straw for filling mattresses, "because, besides their tenderness and loose lying together, they continue sweet for seven or eight years," and it has been suggested that for this purpose the beeches may have been introduced. At any rate there is a fine mattress of old dead leaves beneath these trees even in summer, springy and crisp to walk upon.

"The Eagle and Child," the arms of the Stanley family, was the title of an inn near here. The story of the crest is that an illegitimate son of an ancestor of the family was abandoned by its parents and a passing eagle bore him away to its nest; there, however, instead of devouring the swaddled baby the benevolent bird brought him food and tended and nursed him like one of its own young. How the child returned and became the father of the family is another story, and as unreliable, but the "Brid and Babby," the local title of the crest, adorns the Alderley Park gates.

Old Alderley is a favourite spot for artists; one of its byways is often called Artists' Lane because of the picturesque old gabled cottages whose gardens in summer, full of old-world flowers, are a delight to the eyes. There is the mill, too, by the roadside at the corner, and just beyond is the square tower of the church. The old church, with its stone-covered roof and its sanctus belfry, is a venerable building. The curious projection like a transept with steps leading up from the outside is the Stanley pew, which from inside looks somewhat like an opera-box: it is not often that we find these family pews which can be entered from without; it rather smacks of the days when the lord of the manor considered himself far above the ordinary crowd. Hard by the church is the old school, a plain but most attractive-looking building, and the vicarage, with its garden abutting on the yard, has both beauty and associations. No one is prouder of his church and vicarage than the Rev. Canon Bell, whose father was curate under Edward Stanley, afterwards Bishop of Norwich, for thirty-five years.

For thirty years and more Edward Stanley was vicar of Alderley, and though there are few now who remember him, his name is yet reverenced in the district, as it is at Norwich. What he was like, what his influence was in the district, is perhaps best exhibited by a single anecdote. One day a

Old Alderley.

breathless messenger informed Stanley that a prize-fight was in progress and that all the village was congregated to watch. At once the rector mounted his little black nag and galloped to the field; there was the crowd, watching with excitement the disgusting sight, while the trees were turned into grand-

stands. Right amongst the crowd he rode, glancing to right and left to see who would side with him; but there was no need to make an appeal; the rector's presence was enough. Those near the gate slunk home, others quickly followed; the seconds and the blood-stained combatants seized their coats, while the trees rained spectators; in a few minutes the parson was alone. He had won a victory, preached an effective sermon, without even stating a text.

An enthusiastic ornithologist was the bishop; his *Familiar History of Birds* is a charming little book, written, as it is, by one who loved to watch and study birds. The allusions to Alderley show how closely he observed what he wrote about. The staircase of the rectory is panelled with pictures from Bewick, varnished to keep them from wear and tear; these Mr. Bell delights to show. Bishop Stanley was the worthy father of a worthy son; we cannot think of Alderley apart from the good bishop and his son the dean.

In the churchyard, almost hidden amongst the bushes, is an ancient font which is supposed to date back to the fourteenth century. The vicar who nominally attended to the wants of Old Alderley before Edward Stanley came had woefully neglected his charge, but there is a memorial to one, Edward Shipton, rector in or about 1626, which shows that all the other rectors were not like this man.

> Here lyes below an aged Sheepheard clad in heavy clay,
> Those stubborne weedes which come not off until the Judgement day,
> Whilom hee led and fed with welcome paine his careful sheepe,
> Hee did not feare the mountaines highest tops, nor vallyes deepe,
> That he might save from hurt his fearful flock, which was his care,
> To make them strong hee lost his strength, and fasted for ther fare,
> How they might feed, and grow, and prosper, he did dayly tel,
> Then having shewd them how to feed, hee bade them all farewell.

But I must away to Alderley Edge, or Chorley, as it really should be called, for the first name is now generally used. The title having been given to the station, people now talk of

Alderley when they mean either Chorley or the Edge. The day is growing old and I must seek lodgings for the night. As I ride past the park I think of this ancient family of Stanley; of the master-foresters of Wirral, of the Earls of Derby, of that young man who rode with his eloping bride across the plain to Astbury, of Lathom House and its brave Lady, of the Earl who suffered undeservedly, of Flodden Field and the battle-cry of the Stanleys, and many diverse incidents connected with the name. In those big trees, not very many years ago, the kites nested; the great fork-tailed birds screamed as they circled overhead. So in a letter to his lady, dated 1791, writes the first Lord Stanley of Alderley:—"On the other side of this mere the eye rests on a thick venerable wood of beech-trees above a hundred and forty years old, planted by one of our great-grandfathers on his marriage. There are no trees so large in the country—that is in beech—for the oaks, alas! are gone. The finest gloom is caused by the blended branches of the woods, and the silence that reigns there is only broken by the shrieks of the large kites, which constantly build their nests in the neighbourhood, and the calls of the teal and wild duck to each other in the mere." The teal and wild duck still raise a "joyous clamour" on this quiet pool, but the kites have followed the oaks and gone for ever. And up this road almost daily drove old James Stanley, one hundred and fifty years ago, four long-tailed mares, black as hearse-horses, dragging his chariot, while Critchley, his running footman, kept pace with the four-in-hand.

Alderley Edge is a striking change from Old Alderley; it lies at the foot of the hill that has witnessed many a wrecked cycle and the arrest of many a silly scorcher. Here we have shops and scores of modern houses, for this is one of Manchester's chosen residential outskirts. But though there are so many modern residences, so much of the merchant prince in this district, there are also many old homes worth visiting. There is Soss Moss Hall on the other side of the railway from

Soss Moss, a thick wood; there is Smallwood House, a gabled farm with massive chimney-stacks near the Row of Trees, close by the lonely grave of a woman who was suspected of having died of the plague in 1665; and there is Chorley Hall Farm, which though it lies to my left I cannot pass without a visit.

William de Honford lived at Chorley Hall in 1420, and probably it was he who built the fine stone wing, the oldest and most interesting part. How picturesque are the three gables, the stone mullions and transoms; how ancient those three pointed arches which led from the great hall to the kitchens and offices! Perhaps a century later the timbered end was built; that and the fine courtyard, the double-arched moat bridge, combine to make Chorley Hall a grand old place. In the timbered wing there is one room with old oak wainscots, with ancient carving, and with a most interesting and fantastic overmantle. The modern fireplace looks somewhat out of character with the quaint carving of the female figure above it. One misses the Davenport crest, for this house, like many another, was for many years the property of the influential rulers of Macclesfield Forest. In the fading light, when the great noctules from the Edge are coursing above the fields, and the nightjar churring amongst the firs, I ride back into Alderley; another day has gone.

CHAPTER XVII

WILMSLOW TO PRESTBURY

Fulshaw Hall stands in a small park between Alderley and Wilmslow, and by its side are many modern houses. Samuel Finney built the house in 1684, and here too lived his son, the historian of Wilmslow, a miniature-painter of great fame in his day. Did not he paint Queen Charlotte many times, and was he not so busy that he had to refuse custom, even from the nobility? It was the Queen who wrote:—"Wheras we have thought fit to nominate and appoint our Truly and Well-beloved Samuel Finney, Esq., to be our Enamel and Minature Painter during our Pleasure," etc., etc.

The Mug Carriers and Jersey Combers apparently painted Wilmslow red in 1770 when Samuel became a J.P. It was hardly safe to pass through this unruly village, where drunkenness and disorder added to the difficulty of navigating the shockingly paved roads. Finney set to work and had the highways seen to, and himself saw to the behaviour of the villagers, treating them with such a firm hand that he soon created something like order, or at any rate respect for the law. In a short time "post-chaises and Gentlemen's Carriages began to whirle along the Roads to the great amazement and pleasure of the gazing country people who had never seen such Objects before."

We may be thankful that Samuel Finney set the example of

good roads, for it is a good road though rather up and down. If we turn to Finney's MSS. we shall find some strange accounts of the people of Wilmslow into which we are entering; they were great "eaves dropers," prying into other people's concerns by peeping through windows. Fortune-tellers were in great repute, "and Fearings and Buggarts lurk in every dark hole and gloomy hollow way." They were given to many "Extravagences, Debaucheries, and Disorders."

There is a field close to Fulshaw called Butterfly Bank, a very modern-sounding name, yet in a deed dated 1667 we find "Butterflye Bancke" alluded to. There is also an interesting parish church at Wilmslow, the chancel roof of which they tell me dates back to 1522; on many of the bosses are the initials "H. T.," which stand for Henry Trafford, the rector who built this part of the church. Henry Trafford's effigy, clad in ecclesiastical garments, lies in the chancel. Sir Robert le Bothe of Dunham and Douce his wife, who was a Venables, rest in the church, and the incised brass, much rubbed and disfigured by age, carefully preserved below the mats, shows Sir Robert in his fifteenth-century plate-armour holding the hand of his wife in his right hand which crosses his body. Her flowing hair reaches to her waist, and the feet of both knight and lady rest upon their favourite hounds. Douce died in 1453 and Sir Robert seven years later. So this is the portrait of the little girl who was married when only nine years old. This marriage appears to have been more satisfactory than some other child-marriages; there was one where a youth on coming to years of discretion did not at all fancy his baby wife and claimed a divorce accordingly. And he got the marriage dissolved, for he proved that his guardian had bribed him with an apple to go to church and be married to another baby. The little fellow did more than sell his birthright for a mess of pottage, he sold himself into matrimony for one apple. It must be remembered, however, that these child-marriages seldom meant anything more than securing the

property; the babes continued to live with their parents or guardians until they were old enough to look after themselves, and then as like as not they did not care for each other, and sorrow if not crime was the natural consequence.

Ormerod makes a sad mistake about this Sir Robert, stating that he was one of the warriors who was slain at Blore Heath; if so it took him a year to die. The parish chest to "keepe the Register bookes in" is a solid block of oak, a dug-out, and is a good example of this style of church furniture. There is another memorial worth looking at—in fact there are many; it represents Humphrey Newton of Pownall and Ellen his wife, who died somewhere about 1536. Ellen's head rests on a garb d'or, for she was a Fitton, but Humphrey reclines on three tuns—not nearly so comfortable a pillow — which represents the three families of Newton, Milton, and Phiton "to which I am heir."

In the Wilmslow church accounts there are some curious items; fox-heads at a shilling a piece and moles at one penny occur frequently, but "given to John Downes a free gift for killing several urchins, 4d," is not so plain. We would willingly give more than 4d. to any one who would rid us of some of the urchins who get in our way on the roads, but we must remember that these were quadrupedal hedgehogs and not grimy little bipeds which were paid for. Twopence was another sum allowed out of the parish funds for powder and shot for the churchwardens to execute the pigeons which had become a nuisance in the church itself.

A little way beyond the green I come to Hawthorn Hall, or Harethorn as it was called in the thirteenth century, when the manor was owned by a Fyton of Bolyn. The Hall, however, is not one of the very ancient erections—1698 is the date on the heavy leaden spouts—but it is a beauty nevertheless. Captain Thomas Lathom of "Haythorn" helped Lord Delamere to raise troops for the Prince of Orange, and Mr. Finney of Fulshaw also gave aid in finding volunteers.

Cornet John Finney was but a lad of seventeen when he served with this regiment in Ireland. The initials, "J. L.," on the spout are those of John Leigh, who resided here at the close of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth centuries.

The Wilmslow Council have wisely enclosed a portion of Lindow Common which lies on the left-hand side of the road. This was formerly the racecourse, and they have deepened some boggy spots — the Black Lache or Lake of the thir-

Hawthorn Hall.

teenth century charters — converting them into pools, and have turned the sandy race-track into walks and drives; it is a breezy and altogether desirable spot, for sooner or later residential Wilmslow will spread out here and the value of this lung will then be appreciated. Lindow Common proper extends far beyond this, and though much curtailed is a wild heathy waste where reptiles and insects delight to sun themselves and where the nightjar churrs and the owl beats his nightly round. It is still the habitat of sundews and cotton-

grass and may be of a few vipers. There are lizards still here. Charles Leigh tells about them on the Cheshire mosses :—"The Lizard is frequently found in the Mosses, and is said to be one of those which the Naturalists stile *Philanthropi* or Lovers of Men, never (as they say) doing injury to Mankind, but destroying any venomous Creature hurtful to him." Philanthropic *Lacerta vivipara!* but from the way it darts out its tiny forked tongue it appears to me that the common lizard would resent interference in the same way as the viper if it had the power, and the viper is just as philanthropic if you will only let it alone.

There used to be many vipers on the Common ; Mr. Finney tells of one that killed a pointer and another that bit a boy and gave him a very sorry time. Of course there were lots of stories about fatal bites, and as a viper-catcher paid an annual visit to Lindow, it was quite worth his while to spread alarming rumours, but like all other adder tales of this kind first-hand evidence is sadly lacking. Just opposite the Black Lache are a couple of cottages with a walled-in courtyard in front : this is the old workhouse, built more than a hundred years ago and now converted into dwellings.

The Quakers found Morley and Lindow a quiet spot ; they held meetings here before 1654. Their earliest chapel, which stood on the edge of the Moss, is now converted into cottages ; it may easily be passed; and on the Mobberley side there is a retired clump of trees that throw their shadow over the tombstones of those persecuted Friends who were laid peacefully to rest in the peaty soil more than two hundred years ago. At Morley a yeoman farmer of the old school has died recently. John Goodier Dale is a time-honoured Quaker name ; he told me of these God-fearing quiet folk, his ancestors and the friends of his ancestors. There was a John Dale, curate or minister of Wilmslow in the sixteenth century, before the days of the Society ; he was one of the first Protestant preachers in the old church.

There was another minister here, much later; I do not know his name; perhaps he too was a Dale. The parish authorities came to collect the tithes, and found the good man prepared to oppose them by passive resistance; they claimed the tenth swarm of bees, and in order to annoy the owner, shook the insects loose in his house and prepared to walk off with the hive. "Nay, friend," the minister quietly said, "the bees are thine, but the hive is mine; I'll leave thee thy bees."

Beyond Morley the road dips suddenly to the Bollin, where at Oversley Ford a bridge spans the river. Tall willows overhang the banks, shading the massive leaves of the butter-burr; above and below the bridge the river winds through a romantic valley, where here and there the woods come down to the sandy banks, riddled with sand-martins' holes, and here and there too the red rock peeps out amidst the greenery, warm and beautiful.

To the right is Quarry Bank, where Greg's picturesque cotton-mill nestles in a lovely, almost shut-in valley, and where the old hermit's cave of Disley Kirk, a semi-artificial cavern cut in the soft sandstone bank, is enclosed within the gardens of Quarry Bank House. All knowledge of the hermit, whose name is supposed to have been Disley, is lost, but it is known that a poor man kept his family here, saving house-rent, many years ago; he filled the open front of the cave with gorse to keep out the weather, and no doubt found his rural life far from unpleasant; at any rate if he had an eye for the picturesque he ought to have been satisfied.

There is a delightful walk from Morley along the river-side to Castle Mill; once I took my machine that way through the woods but I shall not repeat the experiment. Castle Mill stands in a beautiful part of the valley, at the foot of Castle Hill, where I can just make out traces of the earthworks which within recent years were evidently very much plainer. Here was a redoubt or outlying fortress of the Castle of

Dunham, the stronghold of Hamo de Masci, one of Earl Hugh's Norman barons.

A swing to the right at the top of the brow beyond Oversley, round by the woods of Norcliffe Hall, passing the modernised cross, and I am in Styal. In the fields and woods that I have just mentioned Audubon walked and studied English birds. In his journal he describes how he "took an immense walk up and down the river, through the gardens, along the road, and about the woods, fields, and meadows." When he went out partridge-shooting, he was allowed to kill a pheasant though it was but the 26th of September, and he picked it up "while his eye was yet all life, his feathers all brilliancy." It is strange to see what trivial things attracted the notice of the great American ornithologist. While staying with Mrs. Greg he went to visit at Mr. Lloyd's, and he remarks that "three men servants in livery trimmed with red on a white ground moved quietly as Killdeer." He pays Cheshire and the Gregs a great compliment when, on visiting the dairy at Quarry Bank, he states that "I saw the finest cattle I have yet met with in England."

When the Duke of Cumberland, hard on the heels of the retreating Highlanders, passed through Ringway, a country youth named Isaac Podmore, a lad of twenty-four, came out to gaze at the soldiers. Six feet four in height, he towered above his neighbours, and his head and shoulders above the people caught the eye of the Duke. Pulling up his horse, Cumberland asked or commanded Isaac to join the ranks, and the untrained country youth fell in, though they could find no clothes big enough for him and had to order a special uniform, and away he marched, untrained and undisciplined, to Scotland. There he fought at Culloden, and afterwards followed the defeated Highlanders to their north country, fell in love with a Highland lass and got married. He did not leave the army, but for forty years fought for his king and country. In Flanders he was badly wounded in the leg, but the giant went on fighting till

a bullet, hitting him in the mouth and passing out at the back of his neck, brought him down. Healed of his wounds he returned to Cheshire, and settled down at Styal, where he lived until he was nearly ninety.

Beyond Styal, which is a neat little village with many good houses, we come to Handforth, and crossing the railway bridge find a cinder lane that leads to Handforth Hall, one of Cheshire's fine black and white buildings. It is not all timber and plaster, however; it has been cased with brick and is painted to represent the old style. Much of the Hall, however, is very old; the date over the doorway, where the muzzled bear's head of the Brereton's is the crest, is 1562, and the inscription informs us that it was built by Uryan Brereton and his wife Margaret, daughter of William Honford or Handforth. Below is a pun on the name, a brier and barrel or tun.

William Honford fell on Flodden Field, where his son-in-law Sir John Stanley, was fighting under Sir Edward Stanley, the hero of the famous charge. Margaret, his daughter, was but a child when she married Sir John, who was a natural son of the Bishop of Ely, who lies in the Derby Chapel, Manchester. Margaret was the heiress to the property, and so Sir John and his twelve-year-old wife entered into possession of this manor. Is it unlikely that John Stanley married her to obtain the property? When, two years later, the Bishop of Ely died, Sir John completed the erection of the chantry chapel that his father had commenced, for the Bishop was Warden of Manchester. Then young Stanley and his neighbour Legh of Adlington quarrelled about the tithes of Prestbury; the matter was referred to Cardinal Wolsey by the Leghs, and the Fleet Prison became the residence of the owner of Handforth for a time. Now that it is known that many of the charges brought against the fallen Wolsey were trumped up, it is not fair to place too much credence on the statement that was made about this affair. Wolsey was accused of unjustly imprisoning Sir John and forcing him to relinquish his lease of the tithes,

and suggestions of gross immorality on the part of the Cardina were brought forward as the reasons why he favoured the Leghs. Whatever the truth may be, the effect upon Sir John Stanley of the failure of his claim is known; he was embittered against "earthly matters" and decided to pray for a divorce, his poor child-wife being willing, and to enter a monastery. So he and his wife signed an agreement "to relinquish all and singular the pomps, vanities, pleasures, and delectations of this world," and Sir John became a monk at Westminster, where he probably died.

The Lady Margaret, finding herself free, seems to have changed her mind. It is possible that she did enter a nunnery. Beamont tells how Sir John loved the Preacher's motto—"All is Vanity," and liked to inscribe it openly, but Margaret's mind turned once more to vanity, for in 1530 she married a second husband, and hers is the name coupled with Sir Urian Brereton's above the doorway. Can we blame her, married before she was in her teens, and married to a man who could cast her off because all was vanity, or in other words because he had failed to keep his position as a knight of the shire? There is evidence too that the children by the first marriage were all amply provided for in their father's will.

Sir Urian was descended from the Shocklach branch of the Breretons, and from them he got the crest of the bear's head. I do not remember if it was here or at Brereton that a visitor, anxious to gain information, inquired why the bear was muzzled. The old man who was showing him round was nettled, but not wishing to appear ignorant, replied after some thought: "Well, you see, it bit one of the family." Sir William Brereton, Commander of the Parliamentarian forces in the North, was descended from Sir Urian, and lived here. He might well carry the bear's head crest, for he bit more than the family, and he did not spare his kinsmen of Brereton cum Smethwick, who were staunch Royalists, nor any one else whose views differed from his. He was openly averse to the

church party, and it is said hated royalty in remembrance of his ancestor who suffered unjustly under Henry VIII. Perhaps the most damning evidence against poor Randle Brereton in the charge brought against him regarding Anne Boleyn, was that the Queen's pet dog, an Italian greyhound, was named Urian after the brother of the Groom of the Bedchamber. Whether the fate of Randle, or other misdeeds of the Crown, influenced Sir William, we can hardly say; but this staunch Presbyterian, friend of Henry Bradshaw, Colonel Dukinfield, and Sir George Booth, gave the King's forces a sorry time in Cheshire. Though the Nantwich troops—the militia—were sometimes repulsed and once defeated, and though at one time nearly all Cheshire was in Charles's hands, it was seldom that victory did not follow a fight when Sir William was in command.

Crossing the stream by the print works I come to a little collection of houses called Dean Row, historically famous for its Unitarian Chapel, one of those conventicles which offended the Church when, under the Presbyterians, they were the religious homes of the men who broke the Church's power. In 1693 this plain but interesting little chapel was erected, for before that time the Presbyterians had met in the houses of the more important gentry who sided with them. In 1672 the house of William Alcock of Fulshaw was used by the Presbyterians, and that of William Linney of Wilmslow by the Independents. There is much similarity in the general quiet tone, the outside staircases, and the tree-shaded yard to the little chapel at Knutsford, in whose graveyard Mrs. Gaskell lies. Simplicity and retirement were what these thoughtful, earnest men aimed at, and the beauty of age now clings to the old chapels.

Dean Water flows hard by; a steep dip to the bridge and a climb up the further bank, and we come to Woodford, where there is yet another old half-timbered hall, half a mile from the church by the side of Dean Water, which belonged to the

Davenports. From this fine lath and plaster building, now called the Oldhall Farm, the family moved to the New Hall, now Newhall Farm, a little farther on, which is a brick and stone house with the initials of the Davenports who built it, and the date 1630 over the door. They subsequently moved to the fine house at Capesthorne. Passing through the village I hear the clatter of a hand-loom in one of the cottages, and glancing through the window see the jumping, jerking "yelds," for in the villages round about the ancient industry is not yet dead.

Beyond Woodford I take a side road to the right, and stop to examine Swineseye, a fine black and white farm which bears the date 1647 and the initials "TC" and "AC," or maybe it is a G. A bay-window has been replaced by a smaller one, and judging from the elaborate mouldings and the wooden pegs in the timbers a large portion of the building is at least a hundred years older than 1647. There is no particular history that I know of connected with this house, but it is one of those ancient Cheshire farmsteads that we come across in unexpected places, down narrow lanes or even in the midst of fields approached only by cart-tracks. The road beyond this, a grass-grown country lane, is, I believe, private, but it is the supposed site of a Roman road, whence and whither I know not. The end of the lane comes out on the Stockport-Macclesfield high-road about a mile from Adlington Station, close to which is a turning which leads me to Adlington Hall, for generations the residence of the Legh family.

Some people say there is nothing in local architecture to beat Adlington Hall in Cheshire, but Bramhall and Little Moreton both claim the same, and in my opinion each has its special attractions; it is like comparing three pretty women of different types, or three species of beautiful birds. Then again some people think that the striking difference between the older and the newer brick portion of the Hall spoils it altogether. The brick front, erected in 1757 by Charles and Hester Legh,

is certainly not in keeping with the half-timbered wing which "Thomas Leyghe and Sibbell daughter of Sr Urian Brereton of hondforde" added in 1581 to the old Hall which was probably erected by Thomas Legh and Catherine Savage at the very beginning of the sixteenth century. There is even reason to think that some of the timber work dates further back than this, but Adlington has seen many alterations and clever is the man who can discover the earliest parts.

The brick front is rather fine, and is not nearly so out of keeping as the modern end of Winnington Hall. On one side part of the moat remains, now converted into ornamental water, and the Hall is surrounded by a well-timbered park. The best of Adlington does not show from the outside; it is the Elizabethan courtyard—I do not mean in Elizabethan style, but built in 1581. It is grand, this courtyard, and is kept in beautiful repair; in places there is a striking difference from the usual painting, for the plaster is black and the timber white.

The great hall has an open timbered roof, and the hammer-beams carry well-carved angels bearing shields; rich mouldings and carvings decorate all the timbers. Over the high table is an elaborate canopy, and the hall is lit by high windows, their sills six or seven feet from the floor, and dormers above. These high windows, which ensured privacy and perhaps protection in time of war, are placed only on one side so as to light the mural paintings. The celebrated organ on which Handel played is placed in a gallery at one end; this was added some time in the eighteenth century. There is no doubt that Handel played on this organ; he was staying with Charles Legh at Milne House, a dower house of Adlington, and the story goes that he here composed the "Harmonious Blacksmith," sitting down to the organ and extemporising a tune which had been suggested to him by a musical blacksmith at Hollingworth Smithy. It has since been proved that this famous tune is derived from an old French air which Handel altered.

Adlington is an ancient place, but it is perhaps rather far fetched to derive the name from Edwin's town,—the Edwin being supposed to be the Earl of Mercia who was grandson of the famous Lady Godiva. In the *Percy Reliques* there is a ballad that begins—

> Will you hear a Spanish lady,
> How she wooed an English man?

which I would fain give but it is too long. Sir Uryan Legh, son of Thomas Legh who built the fine black and white portion of the Hall, was the English man, and the fair Spaniard was his captive. He was under Essex at Cadiz, and the tradition says that he captured the lady, a beautiful and wealthy damsel of good family, and held her as a hostage. That he treated her with courtesy and true chivalry there can be no doubt, for when the command went forth that he might liberate her with all her jewels and property, she did not want to go.

> Then said this lady mild—"Full woe is me;
> Oh, let me still sustain this kind captivity.
>
> Gallant captain, shew some pity
> To a ladye in distresse;
> Leave me not within this city
> For to dye in heavinesse:
> Thou hast this present day my body free,
> But my heart in prison still remains with thee."

Now this was rather awkward for Sir Uryan, and he set to work to try to make the lady see how unsuitable it would be for her to remain with him, and how sea-sick she would be crossing the Bay. It was no good; the lady told him outright how she loved him, until at last Sir Uryan had to confess that there was another lady at Adlington who might object, that same being a wife of whom he was very fond, and he was not going to throw her over for all the cream of Spain's beauty. Then the good captive fell on her knees and craved pardon,

and sent a very pretty message and a chain of gold to his wife; she ended by saying that she would renounce the world and spend the rest of her days in a nunnery "far from any

Near Adlington.

companye." The story is a very pretty one, bringing great credit to both knight and lady, but prosaic people say it has no foundation. Sir Uryan certainly was at Cadiz and he wore a Spanish costume, for his portrait in these garments is in existence.

During the Revolution one hundred and fifty soldiers held Adlington against Mr. Mainwaring for fourteen days, and then they were allowed to march out, the only stipulation being that they should leave arms and ammunition behind—700 arms and 15 barrels of powder.

Perhaps the most direct way to Prestbury is to go back to the Macclesfield road, but a very pleasant lane leads round the Deer Park to Bonishall, a stuccoed house with its beauties covered. From there the way is all right with an easterly breeze; the Macclesfield Sewage Farm is to the west.

In this road too I pass Butley Lodge, an antiquated brick house, and a double-gabled farm with Kerridge-flagged roof, and then arrive at the outskirts of Prestwich, where Butley Hall, an ancient home of the Davenports and afterwards of the Downes, stands overlooking the Bollin. Butley Hall has a very imposing doorway; Squire Downes refronted the Hall in 1777, at least I suppose the date on the water-spouts refers to the alterations, for the house was here long years before that.

The Bollin, but a little stream here, is paved where it flows through the town. I wonder how trout like living on sets. The quaint inns and the way in which the road runs down alongside the river at this point strike me as different from anything else I have seen in Cheshire, but a little further on, opposite the church, Prestbury is a typical old-world Cheshire village; it is exceedingly popular in summer as a rendezvous for cycling clubs and a resort for picnic parties. There are few more charming bits than the view up the street; on the left is the church, with its big lich-gate, and in front a few trees shade the footpath; just beyond is the "Unicorn." On the other side of the road is a wonderful old black and white building called the Old Vicarage, with a curious gallery overlooking the footpath, from which it is said the ejected vicar used to preach his sermons when the church was closed against him; then beyond are some fine brick dwellings, and farther still is the "Black Boy" or more correctly the "Black Moor's

Head," the crest of the Stapletons of Upton. This old inn, which I can recommend, is Early Tudor, and the ancient sign-post in the yard makes a visit worth while, even if there were no other reason. In charge of the sooty but amiable-looking blackamoor who reigns supreme over the inn-yard I leave my machine, and then stroll into the churchyard. Much has been

Prestbury.

written about the monuments and antiquities of this village church, and were I to mention all that is worth notice I should want another volume.

Undoubtedly the Norman doorway, which has been built into the schoolhouse in the yard, is the most important thing to see; it is really the only relic of the Norman church which

stood here. Formerly this curiously carved stonework was considered to be Saxon, and was said to be one of the best-preserved remnants of Saxon workmanship, but though there

The Norman Doorway.

was a Saxon church here in all probability, no trace of it remains. When alterations and restorations were in process in 1747, this doorway was put in its present position. Old drawings, one a very rough one made in the seventeenth

century, show what the figures were like before time had weathered them into their present obscurity. There is little doubt that the central figure represents the Almighty, and that the one on His right is Christ, the dog-like creature being intended for the lamb, while the bird on the left is the representation of the Holy Ghost. The sixth figure is St. Peter holding the key—the church is dedicated to him—and a regal figure has been traced to Richard I. by the budded sceptre and globe with a plain cross, while yet another is supposed to be the portrait of an Earl of Chester, perhaps of a patron of the oratory. Of course there is a certain amount of doubt about this interpretation of such worn figures, but if it is correct the date of the doorway is put somewhere between 1190 and 1199.

Preserved from mischievous knives and pencils, or even from worse mutilations, a Saxon cross stands within glass in the churchyard; it was found embedded in the wall of the church, and was extricated and erected quite recently. Inside the church, which has many ancient relics, is one of those curious incised slabs, similar to the memorials in the chapel at Higher Peover, a graved marble stone with pitch worked into the carvings, which commemorates the death of Sir Edward Warren of Poynton in 1558.

Squire Downes was a great man in Prestbury; a tombstone in the yard tells of a man who died faithfully serving him.

> Beneath this stone lyes Edw'd Green
> Who for cutting stone famous was seen,
> But he was sent to apprehend
> One Joseph Clark of Kerridge End,
> For stealing deer of Esquire Downs,
> Where he was shott and dyd o' th' wounds.

So not very long since there were local troubles for "brittling of the deer." One can fancy that the inhabitants of Kerridge were a lawless set, perched up there on their heights over-

looking the whole country. Joseph Clarke, it is said, had killed some one else before the deer and Ned Green, to wit, one of the unfortunate followers of Prince Charlie.

The schoolhouse, probably the chapter-house, is a quaint, old-fashioned stone building, dated 1626, close to the church; in fact this little village on the banks of Jordan—the name the Bollin goes by hereabouts—is crammed full of relics of days gone by and is well worth a visit.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE HILL COUNTRY

Returning by the road I came by, so far as the station, I rise by a steep hill to the Macclesfield road, joining it at the corner called Flash, a name which I cannot help thinking is connected with those lawless men who once resided at Broken Cross; in a few minutes I reach Bollington Cross. A little beyond this roadside village is the stone-built town of Bollington, a busy hill manufacturing-town. Local sets pave the streets and riding is in consequence not very comfortable; local stone has been used alike for mills and houses. To the southward rises Kerridge, famous for its quarries; on the western side are the houses and cottages of Kerridge, and farther to the south-east the more important hamlet of Kerridge End. White Nancy, a small pyramidical white-washed building, crowns the northern end of the ridge, and serves as a landmark for all Northern Cheshire; I have seen the light catch White Nancy from Bucklow Hill. One man at least who was born at Kerridge rose above mere quarrying; Alfred Gatley, born here in 1816, became a famous sculptor and died at Rome some fifty years later.

On the hills around Bollington hedgerows are replaced by stone walls; not mortared, but cunningly arranged so that they will stand the strain of the fierce winds which rush amongst the hills and down the valleys; stone placed upon stone, allow-

ing the wind to whistle through. How the wheatears love these walls, building in their intricate crevices, and perching upon them to utter that sharp call so like the clicking together of two of their beloved stones. Yet there are hedgerows here, straggling thorn hedges, often enriched with great holly bushes; and there is one lane, close to the Roman road which I take in my upward route, which goes by the name of Hedgerow. Margaret Broadhurst was known as "the cricket in the hedge"; she lived in Hedgerow, and from her great age became an historical character. Unfortunately the only evidence of her antiquity is derived from a remark she made; when asked how old she was, she pointed to her daughter who resided with her, and declared:—"I was fourscore years old when I bare that snicket and she is now threescore years old." That was quite sufficient for our seventeenth-century ancestors to marvel at, so this good lady, who was born at Over, who was sent for to Dunham by Sir George Booth, and who was buried at Prestbury in 1650, has gone down to posterity as having attained the extreme age of 140 years and more.

Rainow is in a hollow, but it is a hollow amongst the hills, and fairly high up too; it is no good grumbling about the climb to Rainow, for it is nothing compared with what is to come. In old deeds the place is often written Ravenowe, and when we look at the great uplands beyond, which overshadow this little town, we can imagine that at no very distant date the harsh "glog, glog" of the sable bird might have been heard as it winged its way above the town from Kerridge to Tegg's Nose. From the top of Kerridge Rainow looks a cold, compact little cluster of grey stone houses, but when passing through the long street we find that it is a considerable size and that it is built closely alongside the climbing road. It is indeed a climbing road, for Kerridge End, through which we must pass to reach the Buxton road, is considerably above Rainow.

Then comes a drop, and, by the way, "Danger" notice-

boards are common objects of the country in these parts; if a cyclist's brakes are not in first-class order I should recommend him to walk down all hills where there is a notice at the top and many where there is not. The age of buildings hereabouts is not easily interpreted; Kerridge stone soon weathers and the style of the houses has not altered very much these last few hundred years. Amongst the trees to the right of the road, riding towards Macclesfield, is the One House, now called the Manor House, though why the old and singular name should be dropped I do not know. This old house, for four hundred years the residence of the Hulleys, has undergone much alteration, and its front at any rate was entirely rebuilt in 1703, for it carries that date and the initials of Jonathan and Dorothy Hulley.

There are names about here that remind us of other parts of the county—Eddisbury Hill, Valeroyal, and Rulowknob—but there is only one Tegg's Nose in Cheshire, and from the way in which they are carving away the excellent stone from its scarred face we may look forward to a time when there will not even be one.

The hill to Langley is not only steep but it is uneven; a steam-roller would have its work cut out if it attempted to level this hillside track; yet it is mostly rideable with a brake fore and aft. Langley is almost entirely dependent upon Whiston's silk-mills, but though the river Bollin here is sometimes dyed red and sometimes blue with those powerful aniline dyes, the valley or clough down which it rushes is well wooded and very picturesque. A little lower down the stream is Sutton, whose ancient Hall has been recently renovated to make it habitable; there were, and perhaps are still, portions of this tree-shaded gabled house which date back to the seventeenth century. When the house was being repaired successful attempts were made in some cases to clean the old timbering and panelling, but it was not always found possible to revive the ancient beauties. Suttons lived here from the time of

Adam de Sutton, Master-Sargeant of the Hundred in the thirteenth century, until in 1601 the estate passed through marriage to the Davenports; now it is a portion of Mr. Whiston's estate.

The ascent from Sutton Lane Ends to Cleulow Cross is long and tedious but it is not severe, not nearly so stiff as the climb from Bosley, but the Cross itself, enshrouded in the little clump of trees at the top of the road, stands considerably over 1100 feet above sea-level. We realise that we are reaching the moorlands when we toil up this road; Sutton Common and Bosley Minn beyond are on the right, and High Moor some little distance to the left; along the shoulder we can see the little hillocks, which are the peat-banked grouse-batteries. Blackbirds give place to ring ousels, and away on the tops is the wailing curlew, his long beautiful cry sounds from a great distance; we often hear but seldom see him.

Cleulow Cross was probably never a cross at all, but is a similar pillar to those we saw in Macclesfield Park; most likely it was a forest mere mark. Possibly the idea that these crosses were placed in position by the monks of Combermere is not far fetched; before the trees were planted on the little rounded hill, the Cross must have been visible from miles around. On the moor near the Cross there is a Neolithic stone circle, which is about twenty feet in diameter, and a much-mutilated headstone may have been a menhir. Some interesting flint arrows, other instruments, and burnt bones were discovered near the circle.

A little further on, almost at the highest point on the road, four ways meet; the one to the right leads to Wincle, where, until the Dissolution, the abbot and monks of Combermere possessed the Grange. How my brake squeals as I rattle down the hill, one, two, nearly three hundred feet below to the church, and then two hundred feet lower in a very short space of road to the "Ship Inn" at Dane Bridge.

In December 1745, or perhaps in the following month, a

weary Highlander arrived at the "Ship" on his way from Derby northward. He refreshed himself at the quiet inn and read his newspaper; then he took a fancy to the landlord's gun and demanded that it should be given to him. What passed is not recorded, but somehow or other the host got rid of his troublesome guest, probably without receiving payment for his food; instead, however, of losing his gun, the landlord became possessed of the Scotchman's weapon. There it is, in the room where I refresh myself, the old battered flint-lock, and there too, hanging on the wall, is the *Manchester Magazine*, the paper he had been reading and also left behind.

Those Combermere monks knew what they were doing when they built their Grange at Dane Bridge; it is a most delightful valley. Very much altered, the Grange stands in the fields that overlook the river, but although some of the windows have been blocked up, three of them still remain—a three- and a four-light window with pointed tops, and a three-light, square-headed window between them—and very curious these ecclesiastical windows look now in the modernised dwelling. For five hundred years those walls have stood in this sheltered valley, close to the stream that divides Cheshire from Staffordshire. Having studied the windows and the walls I take myself to the bridge, where I lean over the sparkling water and ruminate on the past. Not so much on the past, however, for the present is even more interesting. From the willows that line the beautifully clean stream fly-catchers, robins, and chaffinches are making little sallies to catch the dancing gnats. A pair of grey wagtails jauntily jerk their long tails as they work the bank or flit from stone to stone, and a white-breasted dipper courtesies to me from a lump of rock that rises above the water. With a cheery, shrill whistle the sandpiper comes down, flitting over the water with alternate jerk and vibration of its pointed wings, nd just below the shadow of the bridge, even though the sun

is shining, a whiskered bat has so far forgotten itself as to come out to help the martins and other birds to lessen the insect population. Again I must not make comparisons, but what in its way can beat Dane Bridge? About four miles up the stream beyond Quarnford is another bridge, known as "Three Counties," where the Dane tumbles and boils amongst big rocks and where ferns and heather kiss the white water. Here one may jump from bank to bank from Cheshire into Stafford, or again to Derbyshire; here, when the little stony village of Flash, up on the shoulder of Axe Edge over yonder, was a resort of wicked illicit traders and coiners, did the said gentry come when the authorities, armed with county writs, were in pursuit. They had three counties to choose between, and it was not likely that there was a writ out in each county at the same time; they crossed the stream and jeered at the law from the other bank.

It is raining when I return up the hill, pushing my bicycle; it can rain on these hills! A steel blue cloud drifts over Wincle Minn, and then the heavens open and the rain descends; not a heavy downpour, but a steady drizzle which drifts in sheets across those wind-swept moors, blotting out the landscape and soaking everything in a few minutes, but away over Congleton, far down below Bosley, there is blue sky, and before I have proceeded far the storm has drifted away to the west and everything looks brighter for the downpour. When the sun bursts out once more tiny diamonds sparkle on the ling, and crystal drops lie on every bilberry leaf, while the wind shivers a glorious little shower from the firs and evergreens round Wincle village.

There are better roads in Cheshire than the stone-strewed lane that turns off to the right at Wincle Church, but it is a pleasant one; in one place it cuts right through the living rock. Then comes the Congleton-Buxton road, which I cross, and enter a still rougher lane, which is not marked as fit for riding on the cycling maps. Right in front

is the conical top of Shuttlings Low, rising 1659 feet above tide mark, rounded like a huge tumulus; then the lane bends away to the right and follows the course of a clear little mountain stream right into Wildboarclough, or as the natives used to call it, "Wilberclew." Ormerod says it "is a district totally uninteresting; one of the roads through which is partly the bed of a stream, almost inaccessible to any but the natives in the midst of summer." Uninteresting! with the dipper skimming along the stream beside the road—a stream which tumbles and foams as it rushes over ledges of rock green with ferns and moss; with the ring ousel singing in spring beside the road; with the sandpiper whistling to his mate! Uninteresting with those great moorlands, the home of thousands of grouse, stretching away above us, with the hill pastures bordered by their wheatear-haunted walls, and the wooded cloughs where the goldcrest warbles in the firs! When Dr. Ormerod wrote the roads were not like they are to-day, but even in bleak winter, when snow-drifts make these lanes impassable, the snow-clothed hills and the grand storm-clouds sweeping across the tops surely prevent the uplands from ever being uninteresting.

A year or two after Ormerod wrote his invaluable *History*, the year in fact of Waterloo, a change came over the neglected valley of Wildboarclough, for the great house, Crag Hall, which stands high on the hillside above the stream, was built. Then the carpet-works were started, and the stream was made to turn the wheels; cottages were erected and occupied by the hands, and for a time Wildboarclough, perhaps once the haunt of the wild boar, though this has been denied, became a busy scene.

Many years ago I was in the Clough. The great Hall was empty and forlorn, the mill stood shattered and neglected; brambles grew in luxuriance in the tenantless cottages, and the rusted, useless machinery littered the lovely valley. Nettles and docks choked the sluices, and the sedge-warbler

chattered by the silent water-wheel; the works had proved a failure, and rot and ruin had overtaken the industrious Clough. To-day, when I ride up, I find a great change; white curtains cover the windows of the Hall, for at present no one but the caretakers are in possession, but though the carpet-making machinery never turns, the works look in good repair and are clean and neat. There is business going on, for the whirr of the lathe comes from the carpenter's shop, and the chip, chip of the stonemason's chisel from the hill above, for Wildboar-clough has entered on a new lease of life. In the open space in front of the clock tower, where the loaded lurries used to stand before they started with the textiles from the mill, there is a notice—Post Office and Telegraph Office,—and on the hill above, between the works and the mill, a new and tasteful stone church is nearly complete. Neatly dressed villagers bustle about round the now occupied cottages, and garden produce has replaced the docks and brambles of former years. What does it mean?

Lord Derby, owner of Crag and the moorland estate, came one day to this neglected corner of his many lands; he was taken with the place, having a keen eye for nature's charms. He ordered that the Hall should be furnished, for he said that should be his place of residence when he wanted absolute quiet. Then he called on his tenant farmers and won their hearts; he rebuilt the ruined cottages and filled them; he had the empty works put in repair, and turned them into a workshop and storehouse for the estate, and now he is capping all by replacing the crowded, uncomfortable mission room by a neat little church. A man of Lord Derby's standing cannot, however, be allowed to cut himself entirely adrift from the affairs of the nation, and so it happened that one day her late Majesty sent him a message. There was no telegraph then, and before the urgent royal message reached this corner of the hills the date of the summons had passed; this would never do, and before long telegraph poles were erected along

those neglected lanes, and the far-reaching wires stretched over the hills to the Clough.

Above Crag the road climbs again, and we leave the fine beech-trees of the Clough behind, and passing some upland firwoods reach the land of bilberry and heather. Steeper still and more stone-littered, the moorland-edged grit road mounts between grit walls, until beyond the rounded knolls we see the celebrated inn, the "Cat and Fiddle," on the skyline to the right. Great rough pastures, bounded by these rugged walls, stretch upward to the unfenced, breezy moorlands; it is a wild country where one would not be astonished to see the fierce peregrine stooping at the frightened grouse. In the parsonage on the right lived for many years the Rev. Gage Earle Freeman, incumbent of the tiny Forest Chapel. Why should I mention this? Why? because Mr. Freeman, "Peregrine" of the *Field*, flew his falcons and tiercels at the grouse, chased the screaming ring ousel along the mountain streams and the stone walls with his little blue merlins, and broke his imported jer-falcons to British moorland game on these Cheshire highlands; he perhaps did more than any one else to revive the lost art of falconry.

At the parting of the ways we seem to look over the edge right into Langley reservoirs; it would not take many minutes to get down, though it has taken so long to climb; away beyond, somewhat misty to-day, is the flat great Cheshire plain. A notice on a gate directs to Forest Chapel, but the field-path is a rough one; like the curate's egg, however, portions of it are excellent, and I rather startle an old horse and an older farmer who are meditating by the roadside. We sit down on the short turf, with the exception of the horse which is half across the field, and study the points of the long, low weather-beaten church surrounded by old stone cottages in the hollow just below. Forest Chapel is indeed a quaint little spot; its tiny saddle-back roofed tower carries the date 1673, but it looks as if had seen many cen-

turies earlier than that. When Bishop Gastrell made his pastoral visitation in 1720, he thus described it: "Chapel in Forest. This Chappell is not consecrated. Certified that there is no certain maintenance for a Minister, only such small allowance from Ld. Derby and the inhabitants of ye Township when any body preaches there." It is a dear little church, so plain and simple, so in keeping with these wild moors; my old farmer friend, when I talk to him of the new church at the Clough, says, "I like the old 'uns best," and so do I.

There is an "old 'un" on Toot Hill, a small eminence near the Chapel; it is not a church but a Roman Camp, and is not marked on the new map. This name Toot Hill—and there are several Toot Hills in Cheshire—carries us further back than the Romans; back to those far-distant days when Beltane fires flared up at certain seasons on all these sacred eminences, when the wild Celts bowed the knee in worship to their great god Teut or Tot. On these hills was a cairn or upright stone on which the fire was often lighted, and when the Romans came they recognised in the strange ceremonies a likeness to their worship of Mercury; so they preserved the sacred spots. Doubtless, as in this case, there was another reason why the Toot Hill was worthy to be regarded; military advantage had to be considered by the conquerors even more than religion; the camps were placed on every naturally defensive mound. And then the superstitious Saxons still held in awe the ancient places of worship, and much later still tradition lingered in the minds of the inhabitants; who could tell what witches and boggarts might not revel by night round the spot where the fires were once lighted? Was it not wise to continue to offer prayers and perhaps sacrifice to the mysterious deities of the Toot Hill?

The shortest road up to the Macclesfield-Buxton highway is the best from here; both lanes that join this fine road, which climbs round the great shoulder under the rugged grit

rocks of Shining Tor, are steep and rough, but once we reach the road we shall not find it difficult to mount the gradient.

Over 1600 feet above the sea stands the lonely inn which boasts that it is the highest licensed house in England, though there are other public-houses which dispute this honour. The limestone dust lies thick on the road in

"The Cat and Fiddle."

front of the "Cat and Fiddle"; half a dozen waggonettes and charabancs, their blown horses sweating and steaming after the long drag up from Buxton, stand by the roadside; down below, on the New Buxton Road, clouds of dust show where others are ascending; in summer the "Cat" is the favourite drive from the great Derbyshire watering-place. One or two cyclists, white from head to foot, have pushed their machines

up the final hill, and now mop their heated brows; give me grit roads in preference to limestone paving.

A plain, ugly building is the "Cat," but it is such a famous landmark from both counties that it should not be missed. Water is not cheap up here; the tops are very dry in summer; a little farther on, however, on the now little used Old Buxton Road, there is a cool stream; here amongst the heather bubbles out the river which not so many miles away bears on its broad surface the shipping of the world; for the little Goyt which flows beneath Derbyshire Bridge becomes the Mersey, and Liverpool and Birkenhead are no mean seaports.

On a clear day the view from the "Cat" is one of the most extensive in the county; on the one hand are the many hills and dales of Derbyshire; heathy moorlands, ranking amongst the finest for grouse in the country, stretching away to the north and south, while away to the westward is the great plain of Cheshire even to the Mersey Estuary and the misty hills of Wales beyond; Alderley, Eddisbury, Billinge, Peckforton are but mole-hills from this elevation, and clouds of smoke, misty patches, mark the various towns. Close at hand we look down a well-wooded valley, which seems to fall from the very inn itself; this is the Goyt Valley, where good drinking water is plentiful, and down this valley I mean now to go.

A little way beyond the "Cat" a gate on the left hand shows where the road starts, and from here for miles I shall need to do little but use my brake. First there are wild moors on either side, and the grouse chuckle as they skim over the shoulder, the curlew whistles far away out of sight, and the wheatear drops to the other side of the wall; for a space there are no walls, on either side the road is open to the heather, while away down the slope on my right the tiny Goyt bubbles and gurgles amongst the rocks in its narrow bed. A sharp turn and I reach the old mines, where another stream joins

and helps to swell the waters, then a little farther and the trees begin, bright green larches and tall dark Scotch firs, spruces, and other conifers. Here, on the edge of the moor, the blackcocks "lek" in early spring, but one must be out very early in the morning to see them. It is a beautiful ride through the trees, pine needles litter the ground, and rich bracken fills in the interspaces where the trees are not too thick to allow anything to grow beneath them. Tumbling waters pass beneath the road, and rattle down the rocky cloughs to the stream below, where the dipper is bobbing on a stone, and the jaunty grey wagtail hawks for flies. At Goyt's Bridge we reach the level of the stream. The real Goyt's Bridge is not the one which spans the Goyt but the ancient somewhat tumble-down arch that crosses a tributary opposite. It is, as well it may be, a favourite spot for artists.

Errwood Hall, famous for its rhododendrons, is on the left, and crossing the Buxton Road I enter another gate, and descend again to Fernilee.

At the Chilworth Powder Mills, which are scattered along the valley for some distance, the different houses and magazines being isolated and protected from one another by high buffer walls, I cross the river and for rather more than a mile run through Derbyshire. At Fernilee a bridge crosses the now useless track of the Cromford and High Peak Railway, an old mineral undertaking which runs by weird gradients over the hills into the very centre of Derbyshire; in two or three places the trucks used to be lowered to the level of connecting lines by means of stationary engines. This was the case close to Goyt's Bridge, but now the line runs no farther than Burbage, and the track here is grass-grown and obsolete. A little farther on there is a lane to the left, and as duty leads me back into Cheshire I leave the good road and drop down a very steep hill to the Goyt, the boundary stream, jamming my breaks hard to save myself from riding through a deep and stony ford, and wheeling my machine across the little wooden

footbridge. Even here the dipper is playing amongst the stones, and one or two lazy trout rise to suck down the floating, half-drowned flies. It is a beautiful stretch of the valley; a flat marshy meadow, plentifully sprinkled with mole-heaps, is bounded on either side with graceful woods of fir, birch, oak, and beech, while dark hollies and blossom-sprinkled thorns lend contrast of light and shade; away beyond are the bare moors, and on my right, high on the Cheshire bank, is the little church of Taxal, a renovated building with an ancient tower, built in the thirteenth century it is said, whose clock is by no means the least interesting bit of church furniture.

The family of Downes held Taxal "by blast of bugle free"; on Midsummer Day the ruling Downes had to sound three blasts on his horn and pay his annual fee of one peppercorn. And a proud man was Reginald Downes when the King came a-hunting, for his was the right to hold the royal stirrup, and my Lord Derby must in turn hold Mr. Downes's stirrup when he mounted. But the dignity of the earl was affronted, though he could not well shuffle out of the old custom, so he compromised by holding his whip towards Downes' stirrup, and so satisfied all parties. Overton Hall, where this locally important family resided, has long been demolished. The bugle horn no longer wakes the echoes of the Goyt Valley on Midsummer Day, and no royal party comes now to chase the deer, for Downes and deer are things of the past.

Still descending I skirt Toddbrook Reservoir, and again for a space run through Derbyshire, for a large part of Whaley Bridge village is in that county; then recrossing, though the day is far spent, I start to climb. Let not the rider who loves ease and comfort follow my lead, by far the easier road follows the river; Whaley Moor on a summer evening has more attraction for me than Furness Vale and the busy outskirts of New Mills. It is a stiff pull up by Whaley Hall to Stonehead, a stiff pull beyond to the summit, but it is breezy

and cool along the ridge and there is a smell of the moors, though there is little ling or furze on the whale-backed hill. An ancient stone, marked on the map as "Standing Stone," lies a little to the left of the road, but there has been no standing stone there within the knowledge of living men; it is a long rock with two hollowed sockets in which the uprights once stood, and probably they were similar to the existing stones on the higher moor across the valley to the west. The Bow Stones on Lyme Moor are worth seeing, but the road up to that moorland farm on the very top of the ridge is not a good one for a machine. Bowstones Gate is visible on a clear day from most of the eastern part of the Cheshire plain, and is often mistaken for the "Cat and Fiddle"; probably both the Bow Stones and this stone on Whaley Moor were boundary or mere marks of Macclesfield Forest.

It is very lonely on this road to-night, though the busy valley of the Goyt with its print works and mills is in sight all the time; on the loneliest stretch, by the side of the Longside Plantation, just below the summit of Black Hill, more than 1200 feet above the sea, my eye catches a roadside tablet, for here William Wood of Eyam was murdered in July 1823. I do not know the story, but the motto at the foot of the tablet gives food for reflection: "Prepare to meet thy God."

There is no view from here to the west; Black Hill prevents that; but to the south and north and east the scenery is grand. Looking behind I see, in the failing light, the great flat marshy top of Combs Moss, ending abruptly in the steep escarpment of Combs Edge on the one hand, and Short Edge on the other. Eccles Pike rises like a pyramid more to the east, and in the valley between are the clustered houses of Chapel-en-le-Frith, with the heights of Sparrowpit beyond. Then Chinley Churn catches my eye, and behind it Brown Knoll, while Kinder's two thousand odd feet closes the view, black and indistinct against the sky. Northward Cobden

Edge looks down on the crowded streets and many tall chimneys of New Mills. When the highest part of Whaley Moor is reached it does not take many minutes to drop into Disley, now a residential village with a station on the Buxton line. Here at a first-rate inn I secure a bed.

CHAPTER XIX

LYME TO CROWDEN AND LONGDENDALE

From Disley it is an easy walk to Lyme, one of the most interesting historical sites in the county, so leaving my machine at my inn I walk up past the fine old church on the hillside to Lyme Park Gates. A stretch of undulating park land leads up to the Cage, a small tower which, standing at an altitude of 882 feet, is a prominent object from the plain whenever the light is strong enough to enable one to distinguish the lower slopes of Lyme from the darker background of Whaley Moor and the Peak. Some have suggested that the Cage was originally a prison for poachers and other breakers of the laws of Macclesfield Forest, but more likely it was erected as an ornamental shooting-box or keeper's cottage on the highest point in the Park. Alongside the carriage way there is a fine avenue of trees which bends as the road winds along the hillside; it is not straight like the continuation on the other side of the Hall which runs to the Knight's Low, a rounded tree-crowned hillock or tumulus. Lyme Hall, the seat of Lord Newton, is an imposing building with large Ionic capitals in front; it is built in a quadrangular form round a courtyard and covered colonnade. Inside the Hall there are many fine and ancient rooms, some of them, such as the Long Gallery, the Stone Parlour, and the Knight's Room, unaltered since Elizabethan days. The Stag Parlour is

decorated with pictures of the hunting of the stag, for Lyme possesses an ancient herd of red deer, probably descendants of the originally emparked deer that roamed wild over Macclesfield Forest. The chairs in this parlour are covered with tapestry which is said to be made from the cloak worn by Charles I. when he was executed.

Sir Piers Legh, whose tomb and memorial we saw at

Lyme Hall.

Macclesfield, was the first Legh of Lyme. When quite a young man this valiant knight won his spurs fighting for his king, and in 1388 he married Margaret Savage, widow of Sir John Savage, and daughter of Sir Thomas Danyers, who had saved the banner of the Black Prince at Cressy, and captured Tankerville, the Chamberlain of France. Lyme was granted to Margaret as an acknowledgment of her father's doughty deeds, and so Sir Piers came into possession of this fine

estate. Eleven years later the head of the knight was one of the grisly decorations of the Eastgate in Chester; the Duke of Lancaster, having made him prisoner, considered that loyalty to King Richard was a crime worthy of death, and stained his annals by an unjustifiable execution. Leghs succeeded Leghs in the possession of the estate, and Lord Newton, five hundred years after the family obtained the property, is a Legh.

The red deer which graze on the rough park grass are fine animals, not nearly so nervous as fallows; they simply raise their heads and glance at me when I pass, resuming their browsing without troubling to move out of the way; perhaps they are conscious of their importance, who knows that stags may not have hereditary traditions of their ancestors who were slain by kings and by great men in the past. On the stairway in the Hall there is a large picture illustrating the ancient custom of driving the deer at Lyme. It was Joseph Watson, the ancient park-keeper, who died at the age of one hundred and four in 1753, who perfected the art of driving the deer, the scheme being to force them down to a pool across which they were made to swim in order that they might be easily counted. Watson was a great hand at driving deer, for he undertook to take twelve brace of stags from Lyme to Windsor, thereby winning a wager of five hundred guineas for his master Peter Legh. When in his one hundred and third year he hunted and killed a stag at Poynton after a chase of six hours. He had, if all accounts are true, a wonderful life. For over sixty years he tended the deer, for seventy-two years he lived with his wife, who died when ninety-four, and every day for sixty years he drank a gallon of beer. On his tomb is graven, "Reader, take notice, the longest life is short."

Arthur Wilson, the historian, early in the seventeenth century, went with his master the Earl of Essex to hunt the stag with Sir Peter Legh. His account of the chase is very

graphic, but is chiefly concerned with the prowess of the writer. "The staggs there being wonderfull fierce and dangerous," Wilson, along with other gallant youths, attacked one that had taken soil with their swords. After falling, and being called a coward, his endeavour to recover his lost reputation overcame his prudence, and when the stag was held up by the dogs he rode his horse close to the enraged beast, which promptly ripped up his poor steed's side. "Then," says Wilson, "I quitted my horse and grew more cunning, stealing behind him with my sword, and cut his ham-strings, and then got upon his back and cut his throat."

There are several stories connected with Lyme, and one of them tells how Margery Legh rejected the suit of Sir Robert Barton of Smithills, calling him a doleful knight. But at that moment one of the stags, enraged at having been driven across the pool, boldly attacked the couple, and Robert proved his worth by slaying it, although he was badly injured in the fray. When Margery nursed him in the Hall she confessed that she had but chaffed him, and the unpleasant little incident resulted in a new mistress for Smithills Hall. Another story tells of the origin of the Knight's Low, though there is reason to suppose that this tumulus-shaped mound dates back to much earlier days than the house of Lyme.

Sir Percy Legh had not long wed his lady Joan when the calls of loyalty led him to leave her for France. At the feast of his bridal, poor Blanche—surname not known—watched with envious eyes the happy bride, and when later he left for the wars, she too saw him depart. Then came the news how Sir Percy had succoured his king at Agincourt and there was slain. The name Percy in the legend evidently refers to Piers, son of Sir Piers or Perkin a Legh, who was killed at Agincourt. Percy, when dying, begged King Henry to care for his widow, Lady Legh, but made no mention of the less fortunate Blanche. So, by royal command, the body of the valiant knight was brought to Lyme and laid to rest under the

mould of the Knight's Low (either the legend or the memorial in Macclesfield Church must lie), and when home they brought her warrior dead, it was not the Lady Legh who perished but poor Blanche who went to die by the side of the river Bollin, and was buried in the Lady's Grave, a field on the estate.

There is a room in the Hall haunted by a white lady, and sometimes in the stillness of the night a ghostly peal of bells is heard. The white lady is associated with the story of poor Blanche. I cannot locate the Lady's Grave, and I have never seen the white lady, but I do know of some other real graves in unconsecrated ground on this estate which have a sad almost unrecorded history. On the moor, on the Disley side of the Bow Stones farm are one or two lonely gravestones, and others have been removed and put to practical use in a dairy. On one of these is a strange inscription, calculated to make even the careless pause

Think not
Strange ovr
Bones ly here
thine may ly
thou kno
west not
Where
Elizabeth
Hampson ;

and another, where Robert Blakewall lies, is dated July 1646. These poor folk were victims of the plague, and were driven to the wild hills by their neighbours in Kettleshulme. Here they erected shelters, being fed by more kindly souls until they were too weak to fetch the food from the appointed spot, and so they died. There on the barren moor, under shelter of this rough stone wall they lay unburied, until at last some one braver than the rest dared to dig shallow trenches in the turf and lay them to rest.

On this wild moorland roamed in ancient days a herd of white cattle, called wild, and for centuries wild as the feral cattle of the American plains. There is little reference to these wild cattle in Lyme documents; tradition says that they were brought from Lancashire by Sir Peter Legh in the sixteenth century, but there is more probability that they were emparked with the deer when the first Sir Piers obtained the land. Mr. R. S. Bibby says that about 1850 there were thirty-six head; he describes them trotting away when a gun was discharged with "a dignified and well-sustained trot," and adds that the secluded territory devoted to them, though swarming with game, was quite safe from poachers. In-and-in breeding and want of attention wrought havoc with the herd; when too late, efforts were made to introduce new blood, and gradually the Lyme cattle degenerated and dwindled in numbers. In 1884, the year before the last remnant was destroyed, I visited the moor and saw the three surviving animals—an old black cow about twelve years old, another but three years younger, and a bull, the offspring of the black cow and a bull from Chartley, whose sire, owing to his nasty temper, had been killed the previous winter. What struck me about the two cows was their height and bone; they were far larger and more leggy than the cattle at Chillingham, Chartley, or Hamilton Park, and were much wilder-looking than the domesticated beasts at Somerford. As to their ferocity I cannot speak; I only know that they did not run from us in the way the herd at Chillingham will do if disturbed, but after gazing for some time they slowly approached—and *we* withdrew. There are a few who still remember them, and my friend, Mr. Maclachlan, son of the late steward of Lyme, tells me that when a boy he feared the cattle, for many folk on the estate had had interviews with them which they did not care to repeat.

But the white cattle are gone now and the moor is safe, for save in October the stags are quiet, and even then they will not leave their harems unless molested; the chief inhabitants

are rabbits, for there are huge quantities on the extensive warren behind the Hall.

There is one little romance of fairly recent date connected with Lyme which I must mention. In the year 1826 Ellen Turner, the fifteen-year-old daughter and heiress of William Turner of Shrigley Hall, was at school in Liverpool. One day a messenger arrived, professedly from the doctor, giving the alarming news that Mrs. Turner was dangerously ill, and that her daughter must come at once in the carriage provided. Miss Turner fell into the trap and posted off to Manchester, where a Captain Wilson, really Edward Gibbon Wakefield, entered the coach and told her a cock-and-bull story about her father being in trouble, and that it was necessary for Miss Turner to marry him to save him from financial ruin. By force the poor school-girl was conveyed to Halifax and thence to Carlisle, and the blacksmith at Gretna Green made Wakefield and Miss Turner man and wife according to his own peculiar method. At Calais, whither they had fled, Miss Turner was rescued, and a little later the Wakefields and their accomplice Thevenot, for there were three in the conspiracy, were apprehended. After the trial, which resulted in a three years' imprisonment for Edward Wakefield, the marriage was annulled by law, and then followed the redeeming feature of the story. Mr. Thomas Legh of Lyme was the magistrate who came to the young lady's rescue, and so interested was he in her affairs that he developed a warmer interest still, and three years later, with the full sanction of her parents, he brought Ellen Legh, *née* Turner, *pseudo* Wakefield, as bride and mistress to Lyme Hall.

As I return across the Park I hear the deep baying of some great dogs, the sound coming from behind the Hall, for here in extensive kennels is kept the stud of the purest breed of mastiffs in existence; the Lyme mastiffs are known all over the world. It is some years since I had the chance of seeing these dogs, but I remember what massive and beautiful

animals they were; some of them were in paddocks or kennels and some loose, but I recollect that playing with the puppies was not unlike sporting with cart-horses; it was no easy matter to keep on my feet when they cheerfully jumped against me.

Returning to Disley I take the road to Marple, passing on my left a plain farm, which is marked on the map as

Marple.

Wibbersley Hall. This house, or rather the older one that stood on the same site, disputes with Marple the honour of being the birthplace of Lord President Bradshaw. Some of the best authorities deny that Bradshaw was born here, and at any rate the present building is not of great antiquity, so I pass on to Marple Ridge, where the road runs along the top of a hill, with a fine view on the left, to Marple Church.

The square tower of Marple Church, like Lyme Cage, is a prominent landmark. Crossing the Macclesfield Canal, which here, by a series of locks, is joined by the Peak Forest Canal, I drop into the busy manufacturing town or village of Marple, and just beyond Rose Hill reach the park gates of that fine old Hall, which, if it was not John Bradshaw's birthplace, was at any rate his country seat, but the house itself is out of sight.

Marple Hall stands on a naturally defensive site, a steep bank or hill protecting the northern side. Ivy covers the ancient mansion, and through the clinging greenery bay windows, turrets and ancient chimney-stacks peep out; the gable ends and porch, even the railed platform above the entrance, are hidden by creepers and the warm embracing ivy. Old walls with ancient copings, small many-glassed windows peeping from their verdant surroundings, and old-fashioned shrubs and evergreens in the garden, make Marple Hall one of Cheshire's most enchanting old homes.

The Hall was the home of the Vernons, who were closely connected with the celebrated Haddon family, and it was also, as I have said, the home of the Bradshaws, a family more praised and more reviled perhaps than any other in the county. John Bradshaw, whatever view we take of his later life, was a man of singular power and energy; at Middleton in Lancashire, at rural Bunbury, and later at the Macclesfield Grammar School, he used his schooldays to advantage, and then served as a lawyer's clerk at Congleton. London next attracted the young lawyer, and he was one of the many great men who have studied at Gray's Inn. He was past forty when he became identified with the Republican party, and in 1647 he was created by the Parliament Chief Justice of Chester. Two years later we find him President of the Commissioners appointed to try the King, "making a large speech of the King's misgovernment," and after the righteous or unrighteous sacrifice of the royal blood, Bradshaw was selected as one of the Council of State. Here, as had happened before, he boldly upheld his own views in opposi-

The Stables, Marple Hall.

tion to the all-powerful Cromwell, and when that great man dismissed the council after dissolving Parliament, Bradshaw, as fearless a man, replied with great spirit: "Sir, we have heard what you did at the House this morning, and before many hours all England will know it; but, Sir, you are mistaken to think that the Parliament is dissolved. No power under heaven can dissolve them but themselves; therefore take you notice of that."

Fortunately for himself Bradshaw passed away before the Restoration; it was only his corpse that was torn from its tomb in Westminster Abbey and dragged in ignominy through the streets to Tyburn, where one of the most disgusting and senseless acts of revenge that can be imagined was practised upon the bodies of Ireton, Cromwell, and Bradshaw.

Let us not judge Bradshaw or Cromwell too harshly; what they did was not done for personal gain; whether rightly or wrongly they considered that their action was the only one which could result in happiness for their country. It was patriotism even if it was disloyalty. "Had it to be done again," said the dying Bradshaw, referring to the course of action which led to the execution of the King, "I would be the first man in England to do it." John Milton, who knew Bradshaw, spoke in the highest terms of his integrity, honesty, and worth; but when the dismembered corpse lay in the roughly dug hole beneath the Tyburn gibbet, there were many rude biographers who made capital by rousing the public fury against the leader of the men who condemned King Charles. One of the tracts published at that time is supposed to be the last will and testament of John Bradshaw. It commences: "Hell from beneath is moved to meet thee at thy coming. Isa. xiv. 9. In the Name of the Devil and his Dam, The Good Old Cause, Amen. I, John Bradshaw, the most impious villain the earth ever groaned under, etc. etc."

Henry Bradshaw rebuilt most of the Hall; he was the Lord President's eldest brother, and served as colonel in the

Parliamentary army; he used to lament that he had a small estate and eleven children. The story that the fine stables were built by Colonel Bradshaw to accommodate the Roundhead troopers is disproved by the initials and date, 1669, which are carved upon them.

Marple has its orthodox ghost. One of the Colonel's daughters fell in love with a young Royalist officer, an old friend of the family; once, when bearing despatches to the King at Chester, he stayed the night at Marple, and his lady-love, either out of curiosity or from a desire to further her father's rather than her lover's cause, secretly investigated his despatch bag, and then half-cut through the straps, and conspired with one of the servants to finish the job when the officer was crossing the Goyt, so that they would sink and be lost. Next morning her gallant, all unconscious of his lady's treachery, rode off with one of her old retainers as guide. Now this old man thought that there was no use in half measures and finished the business most effectively by sinking officer and all, for the river was in flood. Mistress Bradshaw had gone down to watch the crossing of the Goyt, and was in time to see her lover and his horse swept away in the brown waters; then her reason left her, and now her spook wanders round about. I treat the matter with a certain amount of levity, tragic though it is, for the lady is said to have been Miss Esther Bradshaw and the officer Colonel Sydenham. Unfortunately for the ghost story Colonel Sydenham was not a Royalist, and there is no record that an Esther Bradshaw ever existed.

Within the Hall is an old oaken bedstead, on which are carved, amidst emblematic devices, some mottoes: "He that is unmerciful, mercy shall miss: but he shall have mercy, that merciful is." "Love God not gold: Sleep not until U consider how U have spent the time: if well, thank God: if not, repent." I have not seen this bed, in which it is said Cromwell himself slept, so that I cannot vouch for the exact

wording and spelling of the mottoes, — other versions are given,—but it was under such maxims as these that John and Henry Bradshaw lived day and night; they certainly feared God and loved not gold, and it was unnecessary to add, as some ardent Royalist of the past has done, to the entry in the Stockport register, which announces the birth or rather baptism of John Bradshaw, the word "Traitor."

Marple, though now a manufacturing town, is situated in most romantic scenery, but it is almost impossible to thoroughly enjoy it, so constantly is the valley crossed by roads, canals, and railways, and so familiar an object in the view is the factory chimney. Yet the gorge or valley where the Midland Viaduct, and beside it the Peak Forest Canal, on three arches of 60 feet span, cross 100 feet above the stream, is a bit of woodland hill scenery that is exceedingly charming. Then there is the curious "Roman Bridge," which is indeed no Roman bridge at all, but of much later date; even the work-a-day portion of the place which lies by the river at Marple Bridge, is set in such wild surroundings that one cannot fail to appreciate its beauty.

Perhaps the loveliest parts of the road are the steep descent of Danbank, where the beeches overhang the road and the woodwrens, ever near beechwoods, sing continually in summer, and the spot where the Romiley Road crosses the river at Otterspool Bridge. What a name for this work-sullied Mersey! Surely it was in very ancient days that the otter sported in the deep of the bend. Doubtless it was long ago that the bridge earned its title, but it is not so long since an otter was slain in the still more polluted Tame—little more than ten years ago. At the bridge there is a weir for the Chadkirk Printing Works, and black though the water is, it looks very pretty as it foams over the artificial barrier and amongst the natural rocks below. The woods of Oakwood Hall, where not many years since I listened to one of the few Cheshire nightingales, come down to the river's bank.

Near the bridge is the tiny chapel of Chadkirk, a simple little whitewashed building with grey stone shingles and a wooden bell cot at the western end. Perhaps St. Ceadda, the good Bishop of Mercia, preached in the woods where the river gives a graceful sweep. Anyhow there was a Cedde in Domesday, and it was not waste, Gamel its Saxon owner having doubtless bowed to the inevitable and been granted the land. In fourteenth-century documents, when the chapel is first mentioned, there is no statement as to its antiquity, but at that time it must have stood in the midst of a fertile spot amongst the wild hills, where the startled stags and roebucks peered from the woodlands of the great forest on the monks who tended their village flock. Later than this we find the old name of Otterspool in the forest boundaries. Until the fifteenth century it was known as Rohehundesbrig. There is a holy well here; there is, or was till quite recently, a "priest's walk," and though its poverty probably saved the chantry from the grasp of Henry VIII., it passed from Roman Catholic hands in the short reign of Edward VI. Webb speaks of "an old Dearn and Deavly Chappel, so people call desert places out of company, and resort: called Chadchappel, which seems to have been some Monkish Cell," and soon after this, when the Presbyterians under the influence of such country worthies as the Ardernes, Booths, and Bradshaws, and preachers like Samuel Eaton, were gaining power, Chadkirk seems to have become a stronghold of Puritanism. Adam Martindale mentions it as one of the places which in 1648 invited him to become minister. There is little detailed history of this chapel under the Stuarts, but the Nonconforming principles of the district seem to have come to the front or lain dormant according to the amount of persecution of the times, and when the Toleration Act was passed in 1689, Gamaliel Jones, son of the great Independent minister John Jones, was pastor at Chadkirk. At the commencement of the eighteenth century Gamaliel Jones and his flock were rudely ejected from Chadkirk, and for forty years

the place was left deserted. Above the door is the expressive statement, "This Chapel was Raised out of its Ruines, 1747," and the dates of restorations in 1761, 1860, and 1876 are added. So the phœnix chapel remains to-day in the hands of the Established Church.

Now I will follow the evicted Dissenters to their next resting place, on the hill at Hatherlow, by mounting Bunker's Hill. In dwelling houses at Marple, Woodley, and in a barn in that ancient self-protected batch of cottages in Romiley, known as Hole House Fold or Old House Fold, specially licensed for worship, the congregation held together until in 1706 the "handsome and spacious place of worship" was erected, panelled and furnished with oak, and fitted with a fine pulpit, communion table and chained Bible, which are now treasured as hallowed relics. But the church with a spire was not built then; it was the long simple stone schoolroom, with a wooden belfry, which stands by the roadside on the slope of the hill. May I be forgiven for spending so much time over the history of a chapel. The present building was erected in 1846, during the term of my late father's ministry. Three years later, however, the Rev. Thomas Coward was obliged by failing health to sever his connection, much to his own regret and to the sorrow of his flock, with the congregation meeting at Hatherlow, the outcome of the tiny chapel beside Otterspool Bridge.

In the graveyard of the old Hatherlow Chapel, a local genius, John Agecroft, was buried in 1804. He lived on Barrack Hill, in Bredbury, only a few minutes' run from Romiley. His bust stands in a niche in front of the house he built, and beside it is a tablet with compass and square engraven on it and the intials J. A. On the pages of an open book is the inscription:—"John Agecroft built this house in the year of our Lord 1773." Now John was proud of his work and wished his own bust to remain for posterity to gaze at, but he was not going to demean himself by going to a sculptor. No, the man who could build a house could surely finish it

with his own portrait. So he went to the ditch and squeezed his face hard into the mud, and from this matrix he moulded a plaster cast, and afterwards chiselled a granite bust to adorn the house front. But the bust, alas! is not granite, for it is not the original workmanship of John. One night some revellers returning from Romiley Wakes ruthlessly knocked down and smashed the labour of his hands, and for many years the niche stood empty. Some one—I know not who—has replaced the figurehead of the village *littérateur* and genius.

Had I time I would visit Goyt Hall, a brick and timber house of considerable antiquity; but I must hasten to the hills. As I pass through Romiley, however, I stop to glance at Hole House Fold. It is changed; new cottages have replaced some of the older ones; but still there are traces of the old protective square of cottages with blank walls outside and gabled dormer windows. These folds were built for mutual protection; they could be held by the little garrison of inhabitants against a common foe.

Beyond the railway is the ridge of Werneth Low, a grassy mound up which a road climbs. From the summit there is an extensive view of the great upland manufacturing district; below are the networked streets of Hyde with its sister towns of Haughton and Denton, both in Lancashire, and beyond on every side are houses clustered round mills and workshops—a densely inhabited district strongly in contrast with the vast moorlands which stretch away to the north and the east. When I reach the end of the ridge I see the embattled tower of Mottram Church, standing right at the top of a hill, a weathered rough grey stone building erected when the fourth Edward was King and Alice, widow of Sir William Lovel, held in dower the manor of Longdendale. Francis, Lord Viscount Lovel, last lord of Longdendale, is familiar to all as "Lovell the Dog." Round the church are stone houses, with stone-slated roofs; they may be any age, for the grit weathers quickly, and in these wild uplands there is soon

little difference between the old and the recent buildings. Dropping to the valley and mounting again to the top of the hill upon which the town stands, I enter the church to look at the monument of "Old Roe and his Wife," who gave origin to the hamlet on the road known as Roe's Cross.

There are many stories about Old Roe and his wife. The effigies are sadly worn and mutilated, but traces of the fifteenth-century costume can still be made out, and as they lie on an altar tomb in the Stayley Chapel, it is probable that the identification of the figures as those of Sir Ralph de Staveley of Stayley and his lady is correct. There are weird-looking animals at the feet of each, that at Sir Ralph's is popularly supposed to be a dog; Roe is thought to be a corruption of Ralph. They may well call him Old Roe, if the story and the costume are both correct. Sir Ralph went to the Crusades with Richard I., and like his royal master was made captive. At last he was released on condition that he went home to raise money for his ransom. He was not very happy when he neared the rugged valley of Longdendale, and so disguised himself to see what his relations were doing; and while in mufti he met an old servant and a dog. The intelligent animal recognised its long-lost master, who then learnt from the retainer that Lady Staveley was going to be married next day. Sir Ralph hurried home and asked to see her, but as she was busy with her trousseau, he was refused. Determined to find out the true state of her affections he begged a drink, and when he had taken a sip dropped his ring into the vessel and told the maid to take it to her mistress. Soon as the lady saw the ring she recognised it and swore it must belong to Ralph, or to some one who knew him, so she sent reply asking if the strange visitor could tell of any recognition marks. Of course Sir Ralph could, and all ended happily; the disappointed bridegroom, who by threats had obtained the promise of Lady Staveley's hand, bolting at an opportune moment. The faithful hound lies at the knight's feet, the cross

was set up where he met the dog, and Old Roe, judging by his fifteenth-century costume, must have been between two and three hundred years old.

In the Hollingworth Chapel there is a more recent monument, whereon reclines the figure of a celebrated lawyer, Reginald Bretland, holding a scroll of legal documents in his hand and clad in forensic garments; he died in 1703. There were lively doings here in 1643 or 1644, when a mob of "disordered persons" armed with swords and muskets forcibly ejected Gerard Brown the vicar, chasing him to the schoolmaster's house, where they threatened with spades and picks to pull down his sanctuary. Buried in the hill churchyard lies a famous local worthy, Lawrence Earnshaw, a self-taught mechanic. What Lawrence could not do was not worth doing, though he began life as a tailor and clothier; then he took to clock-making at Stockport, and that gave scope for his dormant mechanical talents. "He could have taken wool from the sheep's back, manufactured it into cloth, made that cloth into clothes, and made every instrument necessary for clipping, carding, spinning, reeling, weaving, fulling, and dressing, and making it up for wear, with his own hands. He was an engraver, painter, and gilder; he could stain glass and foil mirrors; he was a blacksmith, whitesmith, coppersmith, gunsmith, bell founder, and coffin maker; made and erected sundials, mended fiddles, repaired, tuned, played upon, and taught, the harpsicord and virginal; made and repaired organs, and optical instruments; read and understood Euclid" (oh! the great man!) "and in short had a taste for all sorts of mechanics and most of the fine arts." But his great triumph was his mechanical clock, which told and showed everything that could be desired, including the movement of the earth and other little details about all the heavenly bodies, and was sold to the Earl of Bute for £150. One wonders how many hours there were in Lawrence's day. Brindley, the engineer of the Bridgewater Canal, another self-taught genius, was a great friend

of Earnshaw's, and when they met they did not soon separate. Yet this genius, in spite of all his occupations, died a poor man, and was buried in his native village; he was practically a teetotaler, a wonderful thing at the end of the eighteenth century.

While Earnshaw was making clocks and guns and microscopes in Mottram, a baby boy was playing in the streets who was destined to make an even greater, though less enviable name. John Hatfield was born in Mottram, and in very early life got into trouble and left the hill village; then as a young man he married a supposed farmer's daughter, and with her obtained a dowry of £1500 from her real father, Lord Manners. Covent Garden knew "lying Hatfield" and his stories of his Yorkshire estates and his noble relatives, and then the King's Bench provided him with lodgings for a trifling debt, his wife's fortune having fled. Deserting his first wife and three children, he married again and deserted his second, and by constantly changing his name and his noble connections he managed to get along gaily in the world, once even standing for Parliament. He then tried to gain the hand of a ward of an Irish M.P., and, failing in his suit, set his heart on the Beauty of Buttermere. "Colonel Hope" married the unhappy Mary Robinson at Lorton Church, and so obtained the dowry which her careful parents had accumulated, and almost immediately afterwards the unfortunate bar-maid found out that she had married a worthless and wicked adventurer. Soon after this, John Hatfield, after a lengthy trial for forgery, appeared in public for the last time, retaining to the end his impious bluff, for he cloaked his villanies with religion. Just when the hangman was turning him off, he cried out: "May the Almighty bless you all." Poor Mary, about whom so much has been written in prose and verse, got over her troubles and married a worthy Lake District man; Mrs. Harrison, mother of a large family, died at a good old age early in the forties.

Mottram Churchyard is one of the best places from which to get a really good view of the East Cheshire highlands. We are in Cheshire, but only a stone's throw away, it appears, is the Etherow, and on the other side of the little stream is Derbyshire. There is Melandra Castle, the Roman camp, and away beyond the busy hill town of Glossop, Hadfield, and Padfield more to the left; beyond them again are the foothills of the peak, rising above Glossop Moor to the wind-swept plateau of Kinder. Down the long valley—Longdendale—tumbles the Etherow, leaping its weirs and sluices from reservoir to reservoir, as it brings its sweet clear water Manchesterwards. On the Cheshire side the grit escarpments overhang the deep valleys carved by Crowden and Heyden Brooks, and the water collected on those high mosses pours down into the valley below; could we see over the watershed we should look into Yorkshire. Westward are the manufacturing towns of Lancashire, hardly distinguishable from the Cheshire cotton towns of Stalybridge, Hyde, and Dukinfield, and behind them is the smoke of Manchester itself. It is a strange view: mills, tall chimneys, and smoke backed by the everlasting hills; and the works are dependent upon the plentiful supply of excellent water which is collected on those grand cloud-swept grouse moors.

Over the uneven sets, I drop down a steep hill to Hollingworth; a hill so steep that even the slow lumbering lurries sometimes find it difficult to tackle. A crowd at one corner is collected round a two-horse lurry, which only a few minutes before had taken the hill at the run; one horse went down and the timber-laden waggon followed suit, rolling the shaft horse over and turning completely upside down, only missing the wall of one of the houses by a foot. Tintwistle is the last village of any importance up the valley; its township includes some 10,000 acres of barren moorland: I cannot see its seventeenth-century hall, once the residence of the De Burghs.

It is a long climb up past the reservoirs, which come one after the other all the way up the valley, but at last I pass the little chapel and old stone Hall of Crowden, and turning up the Huddersfield road, soon reach the "Tollemache Arms," once a coaching inn, now a temperance hotel.

Crowden Hall.

There is no other part of Cheshire like Longdendale; perhaps I am prejudiced, but I know no other place which in its way has greater attractions for me than this tiny hamlet amongst the Cheshire and Derbyshire moors. Away across the valley, in the country of Derby, the panting Great

Central trains toil up the severe gradient towards the Woodhead Tunnel, or the white expresses slip gaily down to Manchester, using no steam save to keep a hold upon the brakes. Rushing, roaring, and foaming from reservoir to reservoir, great sheets of water, is the life-water of the great city; with Thirlmere and Longdendale, Manchester may well be proud of its sweet water. Heyden Brook and Crowden Brooks, and a multitude of smaller streams, beloved of dippers, sandpipers, and all the fowl of the mountain, leap down the cloughs from the rugged grit escarpments where the merlin builds. Varying hares, brown now but white in winter, introduced many years ago from Scotland, find these breezy uplands so much to their taste that they have spread over three county borders; now they are invisible, crouching in the crevices of the grey rocks, but when the winter snows have melted and they are yet in their white pelage, their little bodies may be seen dotting the hillsides like scraps of paper. Here all the birds we saw up by the "Cat and Fiddle" are present, but in greater numbers; here I have watched the sharp-winged peregrine floating above the crouching grouse; here ring ousels sing and curlews bubble and the "sheep's guide," as they here call the black-bellied golden plover, whistles its plaintive note. Ling and heather, cowberry, cloudberry and bilberry, cotton grass and sundews, and all the hosts of alpine and subalpine plants flourish upon the moors. Featherbed Moss is the name of one portion of the wild tract, and where on the Yorkshire border the summit of Black Hill is reached, we can stand on the highest spot in Cheshire, more than 1900 feet above the sea.

CHAPTER XX

CROWDEN TO NORTHENDEN

On a good road, in the cool mountain air, I slip down to Hollingworth, passing through the long village street lined with stone cottages and turning to the right to Roe Cross. The road climbs again, and then passes through a deep cutting, where a branch road climbs still higher along the hillside to that delightful old stone house, Hollingworth Old Hall. The actual date of this building is not known, but most of the outside, save some eighteenth- and nineteenth-century alterations, dates from the late Tudor or early Jacobean periods; inside it is certainly older. The Old Hall is a private house, and not a show place, so that I should not advise cyclists to leave the main road. Nevertheless I am indebted to the owner of the Hall for showing me its beauties; the fine staircase with an oak-panelled landing is one of the best I have seen in the county, while some of the beams and rough oak floorings of the upper rooms are most interesting. The porter's lodge and gatehouse, once so famous, have been removed, and a new porch takes the place of the old one; but the crest of the Hollingworths—three holly-leaves—was replaced over the doorway when the alterations were made. These millstone-grit houses retain their beauty and stability long after later "magpie" buildings have become uninhabitable; they look

cosy and homelike when less solidly built mansions let in the draughts and crumble to dust and ruin.

When over the watershed one soon reaches the tramlines, and on the level sets between the rails one can ride with comfort. It is a splendid run from here to Stalybridge. From the moorlands I drop suddenly into the heart of a great manufacturing district, for Stalybridge and its Lancashire sister town Ashton-under-Lyne were amongst the earliest of the places

Hollingworth Old Hall.

engaged in the cotton trade, and have had no small share in the prosperity of Lancashire. Up the valley on my right is the once wild district of Staly Brushes, still beautiful, a country much resorted to by the earlier Manchester field-naturalists. Many a rare bird, insect, and flower has been brought home from here on Sunday night by a rejoicing workman whose scientific tastes have elevated him above his neighbours. Lancashire has always been famous for its working-men

naturalists, some of whom have done much valuable work and made fine collections. Buckton Castle stands on a naturally defensive site overlooking the Tame Valley; like Eddisbury and Kelsbarrow it has a history which we can never fathom, but we can admire the choice of those old fort builders who placed their camps high on the fell sides.

The bridge over the Tame was dated 1707, but now a very modern bridge stems the dirty stream; the old stone bridge is gone. Boar Fold, Hartley, and Hartshead, and in fact Swineshaw Brook are possibly names connected with the former inhabitants of the wilds; there is little to suggest wild boars and stags in the cotton-mills, shops, and thousands of artisan houses. When we look upon those eternal hills, which it seems impossible to reclaim, we can imagine how once the forest game wandered down in hard weather to shelter in the valley of the Tame.

When early in the last century power machinery was getting its first hold, Stalybridge was one of the spots where the Luddites held their revels. One of the machine-breakers and mill-wreckers, chased by the authorities, took refuge here in a coal-pit by sliding down the rope. For three days some forty constables guarded the pit-mouth, trying to starve him out, but an equal number of rioters raised the siege, driving the guards away. This was but one of the scenes which disgraced the manufacturing districts about the year 1812.

There is no clear demarcation between Stalybridge and Dukinfield; the houses are continuous. In the country it is seldom difficult to find the way so long as one has a good map; but amongst these streets, all so much alike, it is only too easy to go wrong. Twice I find myself on the point of riding into Lancashire. On the far side of Dukinfield, almost surrounded by mills, and with works close to its south front, is the ancient home of the Dukinfields. Now converted into three cottages, the overhanging timbered gable decorated with quatrefoil ornaments looks strangely out of place. The other gable, near the

still existing pointed doorway, is stuccoed, but the plaster is crumbling away, while even at the south side the brick casing is now quite ancient work. It was once a fine building and a very beautiful one, but it looks sad and neglected now. Next to it is the Nonconformist chapel of the Dukinfields, licensed for private service in 1398, which has passed through sorry times to rise once more faithful to its ancient purpose, though not its first creed. The old Catholic chapel is now a transept of the modern Nonconformist church, having been used at times as a henroost and a stable.

There were Dukinfields here, or rather one Robert de Dokenfield, in 1315, and until the property passed by marriage to the Astleys in the eighteenth century, Dukinfields ruled the manor. If, as is generally supposed, the name Dukinfield refers to the time-honoured custom of punishing scolds by ducking them in a pond, this form of correction must be very ancient; it is quite possible, however, that the derivation of the name is more obscure. Perhaps the greatest of the family was Colonel Robert Dukinfield, a strong Nonconformist and upholder of the Parliament under Sir William Brereton. When only twenty-four he took active part in the troubles of 1643-44, capturing after a fierce struggle Mr. Tatton's house at Wythenshawe. He was a member of the High Court of Justice, but perhaps his office of Sheriff of Chester, when he sat on the court-martial of the Earl of Derby, kept him from participating in the trial of the King. He is accused of employing treachery in capturing the Isle of Man and its ruler the Countess of Derby, but the Earl seems to have had a good opinion of him, for he wrote to his wife, previous to her capture, advising her to make what terms she could with the Colonel, as he was a gentleman born. He refused with sincerity and modesty Cromwell's attempt to enlarge him, for he did not agree with all the Protector's methods. Dukinfield, however, was not slack in his efforts on behalf of the Parliament; after Cromwell's death we find

him in arms, and mainly responsible for crushing the abortive Cheshire rising of Sir George Booth. After the Restoration he was arrested and tried for his share in Lord Derby's court-martial, and on a trumped-up charge of disloyalty was imprisoned. At last, however, Charles became gracious, and Dukinfield's son was created a baronet. Dr. Hibbert tells a story, which is quoted by T. W. Barlow as evidence of the Colonel's kindly nature. He one day met a lad driving a cow to Dukinfield Hall, for the boy's father was dead and this animal was claimed as a heriot. The Colonel stopped the lad and asked him where he was taking the beast; not knowing to whom he was speaking the boy replied, explaining his mission, and added, "My father is dead; we are many children and have no cow but this; don't you think the devil will take Sir Robert for a heriot when he dies?" Without revealing himself, Sir Robert sent the lad back to his mother with the cow, telling him that he would see the Colonel and make all right.

Under Colonel Dukinfield's rule the private chapel at the Hall became one of the earliest Independent places of worship in the county; in 1644 we find it a Nonconformist chapel. Samuel Eaton, a well-known divine, was minister, and a strange story is told about the place. One day, while the pastor was preaching, the startled congregation heard the sound of a man beating a drum; up the aisle the invisible drummer sounded his march, and though the parson stopped preaching and fell to praying, the sound ceased not, neither did the ghostly drummer disclose himself. So "they broke up their exercise for that time and were glad to be gone," and "Gangræna Edwards," who relates the story, proceeds to point a moral and adorn a most unlikely tale, for he declares that the church of Dukinfield is the first "Independent church visible and framed that was set up in England," and that the Independents are for wars and thirst for a new war "as much as ever an unhappy boy did to be at fisty-cuffes with another boy." These he predicts shall be their ruin, and the beating of the drum which

broke up the meeting was a solemn sign of what was to come.

According to Adam Martindale, the church at Dukinfield had a sorry time through the carelessness of Eaton, who was much occupied in the affairs of the county and often stopped away some time from his charge, his place being supplied by "bitter, presumptuous fellowes," but under Samuel Angier, spite of persecution, the congregation held together, though some of the brethren, according to Martindale, had fallen out amongst themselves so sadly, "even to printing one against another."

John Astley, the celebrated portrait painter, is said to have painted the heiress of the Dukinfield estates and fallen in love with her at the same time; at any rate his descendants, through the female line of the Dukinfields, came into possession, and so late as 1810, but a year or two before the machinery riots, we might have seen a pack of harriers kennelled near the Hall.

By visiting Dukinfield Hall I miss a large part of Newton, where there is another old hall, dated 1670, converted into cottages. It seems rather strange that one of the most typical Lancashire writers, John Collier, far better known as "Tim Bobbin," was born at Harrison Fold, a collection of cottages in Newton township; doubtless his earliest Lancashire dialect was learnt in Cheshire, though as a young man, after serving as a weaver, he became a Rochdale schoolmaster.

From Newton to Hyde is no great distance, and I hurry on over well-paved but, to me, unattractive busy roads. Sophia Astley, the pretty, spoilt daughter of John Astley of Dukinfield, eloped with George Hyde Clarke of Hyde Hall. Her father left her an annuity which was to cease if at any time she married "that execrable villain George Hyde Clarke," who then lived in Jamaica, whither he had first taken his stolen bride. The Clarkes and Hydes intermarried, and in Chester Cathedral is a memorial to George Clarke of Hyde, who was at one time Governor of New York. This was not the only famous Hyde, for

it was a member of this family who became Earl of Clarendon, and his grand-daughters Mary and Anne, daughters of Anne Hyde, became Queens of England.

There are dozens of "folds" in the neighbourhood of Hyde; any one unacquainted with the word would imagine that the early North Cheshire folk were pastoral. It was the proximity of the Lancashire border which made it necessary for small holders to protect themselves from the raiders from the more northern shire. Inter-manorial raids were frequent up

Harden Hall.

to the sixteenth century, and there was often unpleasantness between the landowners in adjacent counties. Beyond Gee Cross, by the side of the Melandra highway, are Cheetham, Gerrards, and Charlton Folds, and then the road enters Woodley. A little further—just a mile—I leave the Stockport road, and run northward towards the river, where I shortly see, peeping above the brow on the left, an ancient ruined tower. Harden or Arderne Hall stands on the edge of a great bank that overlooks the deep valley of the Tame, now a rich orange yellow, but

once a clear mountain stream, where it has stood since, in the days of King John, Richard de Hardena ruled this manor. The Plantagenet house has disappeared, and the late Tudor building, which tradition says was built in the shape of an H, is now nothing but an imposing ruin, the more modern farmstead having been built partly inside its roofless great hall. John of Gaunt, we are told, lived in this identical building, but this is without doubt a myth. The ruined tower, with an octagonal turret, and the crumbling walls of two smaller towers, cannot be older than the very end of the sixteenth century, although one old stone carries the date 1558. The hall, they tell me, is Elizabethan, and portions of the east and west wings are older than the tower, but to me, an amateur antiquarian, there is little left to judge by.

So far as I am concerned, however, the actual date of the building matters little. On the high bank of a still lovely valley, in the midst of a great manufacturing district, rubbing shoulders with collieries and hat factories, stands this ruined country seat of one of the most important of the Cheshire families.

The Ardernes, Ardens, Hardens, Hawardens, as the name was variously spelt, had property in various parts of the county, and were one of the families who for generations retained the forest rights. Is not the Earl of Haddington of Arderne Hall, Tarporley, hereditary chief forester to-day? The title came from the Ardernes of Harden and Alvanley, of Tarporley, Utkinton, Eaton, and elsewhere, and last but not least of the old town house in the Underbank, Stockport. There is a melancholy interest for antiquarians in connection with Harden Hall. Just about a hundred years ago, so Dr. Clay told Mr. Earwaker, the house was falling into decay. The farmer who occupied the property knew nothing and cared less about antiquities; he pulled the old oak wainscots down to feed his fires; he burnt the "rubbish" from the ancient library; he did whatever he liked with the furniture and pictures. Dr. Clay as

a lad spent much of his time at the Hall, and he well remembered practising with a bow and arrow at the figures in the pictures; sadder still he recollects watching the "fireworks" of melting wax that fell from the seals of the ancient documents which the ignorant old farmer was burning as worthless. How much priceless matter was consumed in this way we shall never know; it has gone beyond hope, and the best we can do now is to forget the destruction, but to see that useful and interesting relics are no longer left at the mercy of uneducated men.

Now I must back through Brinnington to Stockport, entering the town by way of Vernon Park where there is an interesting little museum. There are many worse approaches to a great manufacturing town than the north-east end of Stockport, through which the Mersey flows to its junction with the Tame. A great and busy town is Stockport; built on many hills, its streets are not the easiest to ride, but the situation saves the place from being altogether ugly. The lower part of the town is certainly not beautiful, but many of the more modern buildings are worthy of a go-ahead town, and Stockport is nothing if it is not go-ahead. Mills and factories everywhere, tall chimneys galore, these are the nuclei of the thousands of cottages, these are the places where the teeming population gets its daily bread. Let us not then condemn them; towns like Stockport are necessary to England's boasted commercial greatness.

Stockport is no mushroom town; the barony of Stockport is as old as the other Norman baronies, and though all traces of its castle have disappeared, it can still boast that within the last century there were men living who could remember the ruins. Sir George Warren, lord of the manor, levelled the ruins in 1775, erecting a tower, perhaps with the identical stones, as a memorial of former times. More than four hundred years ago the claims of the baron were questioned by Prince Arthur, son of Henry VII.; as Earl of Chester he summoned Sir John

Warren to explain his rights. This Sir John did at some length, stating that he could punish all delinquents within his jurisdiction with fines, pillory, or tumbril, adding that he, John Warren, steward of the manor, did these things at his own pleasure; the Prince, were he Earl of Chester or no, had no authority to challenge his ancient prerogative.

The right to punish offenders was perhaps the most important claim of these old boroughs, and at Stockport, as in other towns, we find some strange records of the methods of our ancestors. If a felon was found guilty within the jurisdiction of the town, but was tried and condemned at Chester, the servants of Sir John were to bring him back "to his own proper gallows and there hang him." Why should Stockport be deprived of the right of seeing his last struggles? The shrews of the borough were provided with "a certain low seat called a cookyn stoole," and with a particularly cruel brank which is still preserved; its gag is armed with sharp spikes which would hold fast the wagging tongue in a terrible grip.

Stockport or Stopford Bridge is an old river crossing; there was a bridge here in the fourteenth century. It was the bridge which brought many armed parties to the town. When the Countess of Derby was bravely holding Lathom House, and the weather was helping her by fighting against the rebels, as we read in *Mercurius Aulicus*, Prince Rupert arrived at Stockport hurrying to her relief—the writer calls it "Stopworth, a towne of Cheshire"—and a strong garrison, some three thousand horse and foot, drew out to stop his progress. About six in the evening the foot soldiers arrived, the Prince's cavalry was already engaged, and the Roundheads retired and lined the thorn hedges. Rupert, however, was too quick for them, and his dragoons were sent riding along the hedgerows followed closely by the main body of the cavalry so that the defenders fled pell-mell towards the town. On their heels came the victorious Royalists, and Stockport with all its arms and ammunition fell into the hands of the King. We fear that this account

is too true; Burghall, who would never make out too good a case for the Royalists, confirms it and says that the defenders fled into Lancashire, thus failing to stop the advance. What followed we know; Lathom was relieved, Bolton suffered a terrible massacre, and Liverpool fell into the hands of the gallant but unscrupulous Prince.

In the '45 rising the crossing at Stockport was again in use, and when the disheartened Jacobites returned they "were very rough as they went thro' Stockport and took Mr. Elcock and 2 or 3 more with 'em with Halters about their necks." It is a comfort to know that the unpleasant journey of these haltered gentlemen only lasted so far as Manchester, where they were not hanged but allowed to go back. We can imagine the rejoicing when Cumberland's troops arrived, and the wives and families of those who had gone out to be hanged saw them return safe and sound to the now protected town.

The tax on saddle-horses was one of the means used to raise the revenue when the American War was costing the country much treasure and many valuable lives. Jonathan Thatcher, often called "The Cheshire Farmer," surprised the gathered folk in Stockport Market one morning by riding gaily in on his saddled and bridled cow. In a contemporary squib we see the clever Jonathan approaching the "Sun," now the "Albion"; his bovine steed is stepping on a paper labelled "Tax on Horses," while from the mouth of the farmer issue the words: "Pitt be d——d."

There is but little old work left in Stockport now; one of the oldest landmarks—"The White Lion"—has gone at last; a fourteenth-century inn cannot be safe for ever. A recent chronicler of this inn tries to prove that it is not the one where, some two centuries ago, the following uncomplimentary lines were scribbled on a window:—

If, traveller, good treatment be thy care,
A comfortable bed, and wholesome fare,

A Modest bill, and a diverting host,
Neat maid, and ready waiter,—quit this coast.
If dirty doings please, at Stockport—lie;
The girls, O frowzy frights, here with their mistress vie.

There is one old house—I have mentioned it before—in the Great Underbank which should not be missed; the ancient

The Bank, Stockport.

town house of the Ardernes is now the Manchester and Liverpool District Bank. Beautiful half-timbering adorns the exterior, panelling and oak carving the interior; Stockport may well be proud of its bank.

Near Duke and Wellington streets there is a great, four-

storied building, red brick, with two bays reaching from ground-floor to roof, a somewhat plain yet imposing edifice which stands well on a terrace. Though not very old this building has a famous history.

Yet there are some who will scoff and say, "Why! it's only a Sunday School." That is exactly what it is, and what Stockport may well boast of, for this Cheshire town was in the very forefront of the great Sunday School movement. Towards the end of the eighteenth century a number of devoted men, putting aside all differences of creed, decided that the education of the working-classes, so large a majority of the inhabitants of the town, was woefully neglected; there was no time and chance for the poor children to learn even the three R's. Work, hard work in the mills, kept them busy all day, and in the evening they were too tired to labour with their brains. Why, said these men, should not the chance be given to them on Sunday? So in a few cottages schools were started, and volunteers were found ready to give up their day of rest to teach others how to read and write. The movement met with a ready response; an empty factory was taken, and so for twenty years it grew, until in 1805 the present building was erected, large enough then to accommodate all who wished to learn, and in time to let Robert Raikes, the founder of Sunday Schools, see that Cheshire had nobly answered his call by raising one of the first Sunday School buildings. There, every Sabbath, would be found men of all creeds—Churchmen, Nonconformists, and those who had no creed save the raising of the masses—toiling side by side in harmony to give Stockport's neglected children a chance of rising in the world. How many of the merchant princes, how many of the successful business men, how many of the philanthropists of the present and the recent past could boast that at Stockport they first grounded themselves in the elements of learning? Now, though many other schools have been opened, though no longer the education of the masses is left to voluntary teachers,

the old Sunday School, grown and enlarged to more than twice its original size, is still popular. Since it was started 108,040 scholars have passed through the school and 6197 teachers have done their best to help others. Reading and writing need no longer be taught on Sunday; gradually the object of the teaching has changed, and now the children are grounded solely in the rudiments of religion..

As I pass from the building I find myself humming a well-known hymn — the tune which the church bells ring out on Christmas morning calling on Christians to awake and salute the day; that tune is associated in my mind with this town, for John Wainwright, one time organist at the Manchester Cathedral, then the Collegiate Church, the composer of "Stockport," was a Stockport man. Often the tune is called "Yorkshire" and other names, but "Stockport" was its original title. His son Robert was also a great organist; it was he who competed with the then unknown Herschel, afterwards the great astronomer, for the post of organist on Snetzler's newly erected instrument at Halifax. Wainwright, with brilliance and dash, having the first opportunity, played some sparkling piece, but poor old Snetzler ran about the church almost tearing his hair. "Der teufel, der teufel," he cried, "he run over de keesh like one cat—he will not gif my pipes room for to shpeak." Then Herschel, hautboy player in a German military band, sat down, and attempted nothing more striking than the "Old Hundredth"; but such feeling and sentiment did he put into the grand old tune that Snetzler himself was spellbound; almost with tears in his eyes he cried: "Ay, ay, tish is vary goot, very goot indeed! I will luf tish man, he gifs my pipes room for to shpeak."

There were bad times in Stockport in 1812, when King Ludd was ruling the manufacturing districts; mills, machinery, and private property too, were broken, looted, and destroyed. So when, five years later, the peaceful gathering in St. Peter's Square, Manchester, was dispersed with brutal violence,

gaining the name of the Peterloo Massacre, the military watched the working population of Stockport who had been asked to join in the meeting. The "Blanketeers," a body of the reformers who had decided to march to London to air their grievances and had provided themselves with knapsacks and blankets, marched away from the broken-up meeting towards Stockport. At the bridge they met the Life Guards and the Macclesfield Yeomanry, but wisely did not attempt to force a passage. Some of the more determined spirits, however, forded the Mersey and some five hundred of them managed to get as far as Macclesfield, where they were dispersed, fortunately without bloodshed. "The soldiery behaved with the greatest patience" we are told; would that the same could be said of the magistrates and officers of the yeomanry at Peterloo. One of the women who was concerned in the riots was known as Mrs. Ludd; she was arrested and locked up in Stockport, but she grew so fond of her gaoler that she would not leave her prison, and in the end remained there permanently as mistress of the gaol and wife of the gaoler.

I have one serious charge against Stockport: except on the recently laid electric tram-lines between Stockport and Cheadle it has the vilest roads in Cheshire; I know, for I smash my saddle bumping over its sets. Most of the hilly streets are paved with sets, great square blocks of stone; these if decently cut and put down are not bad to ride over; but here they are most uneven and one jumps and jolts from stone to stone until every bolt and nut is tried to its utmost. The macadam is no better, and even in this enlightened town I come across one long stretch of cobbles. Now cobbles are a Cheshire speciality, but save in the most out-of-the-way country lanes and in front of a few farms they are now extinct; why Stockport should harbour such abominations I do not know. Cobbles are the round boulders from the glacial drift and clay of the great Cheshire plain; they are a rough and ready means

of pavement which at one time decorated all our town streets: the stones, round and smooth, are let into the ground, half a sphere remaining uncovered, and there is a delightful variation in the shape and sizes of the boulders. They will try the mettle and the metal of any cycle, and are very bad for the temper of the rider.

Passing southward out of Stockport I make for Bramhall, leaving away on my left the village or town of Hazel Grove, a pretty but most unnecessary name for the place. Bullock's Smithy was the old name of Hazel Grove, and so it ought to be to-day, but the fathers of the hamlet did not think it euphonious, and so changed it to the meaningless name it bears now. In 1560 John de Torkenton left to one Richarde Bullock, the smith of Torkington, "all that smithye," and so by the roadside grew up the little village, clinging to the ancient name, until the snobbish inhabitants thought that something more rural but without any associations would sound better.

Bramhall is one of the last old Cheshire homes which I shall visit, but according to many it should rank first of all. To this I cannot agree, there is no first where there are so many differences in beauty and association; it would be useless to compare Bramhall with Little Moreton, with Baguley, Huxley, and Poole; all are worth visiting and all have special charms.

The Hall as seen from the park is exceedingly fine; it is one of the best preserved and largest of the "magpie" buildings of Cheshire. Originally it was quadrangular, but in 1819 the west wing was removed; what remains consists of thirteenth-century work on the north and fourteenth on the south. Much alteration, rebuilding, and renovation has been necessary from time to time, so that we find traces of the best work of almost every period. A great deal of the inner decoration is Elizabethan—the royal arms of Queen Bess and the date 1592 occur in the carving over one of the door-posts and on an overmantle in the drawing-room. The banqueting

Bramhall Hall.

hall, a fine room 40 feet by 20 has its timbered sides painted with figures and foliage to represent tapestry, and is lighted in the centre by a fine oriel window; its fourteenth-century roof is still in excellent preservation, the massive arched timbers look as if they were meant to last. There are all the usual rooms of the old-time homes, including the private chapel, which contains a handsome oak stall brought from the Davenport Chapel at Stockport. Some will say that it is a pity that the great hall is not, as it undoubtedly once was, open to the roof; but when we consider that it was in the sixteenth century that the alteration was made and that the upper part now contains that fine Elizabethan drawing-room, we need not mind.

A branch of the influential Davenport family lived at and owned Bramhall, and there are many worthy names connected with its history, perhaps not least of them being Sir Humphrey Davenport, Chief Baron of the Exchequer under Charles I. The heirs male, however, of this branch of the family failed early in the last century and Bramhall was subsequently sold to a property company, after, however, much of its best stained glass and furniture had been removed to the present family seat at Capesthorne. Charles Henry Nevill, Esq., bought the Hall and has since put it into perfect repair, renewing all the parts which time was fast destroying, so that to-day Bramhall, though safe and sound, shows all the ancient beauties which careful renovation could preserve.

Harrison Ainsworth in *Rookwood* introduces the right-of-way through Bramhall Hall, which was and, I believe, still is claimed by some people. Now the question of the closing of rights-of-way is a difficult one; no one wishes to see the ancient rights of the people destroyed, but it is only fair to consider how the right-of-way through the courtyard of a private house came into existence. In the old days when the lord of the manor was a power his house was free to all, and his tenants were allowed to pass from one part of the estate to another by entering the main gateway, crossing the

courtyard, and passing out behind. Travellers were few then and they were always made welcome so long as there was no fear of hostile intentions. Thus people got to imagine, through the hospitality of the owner, that the footpath through the precincts was their legal right; but to claim that right now, where the passage means crossing another man's house—his "castle"—is quite another thing. Indignant agitator, how would you like it if some one walked in at your front door and passed out at the back, swearing that he remembered a right-of-way? There are limits to everything.

Sir William Brereton did not bother about a right-of-way when he visited Bramhall; his musketeers stood round in the park, burning matches in their hands, while a chosen body of searchers went through the house of William Davenport and made the family open every chest and cupboard to reveal the contents. When they went away they took seventeen horses out of the park—they had already had some the month before—forcibly unseating some of the retainers who did not wish to yield their steeds. So they went away, as William Davenport reports, "not leaving me soe much as a horse to ride on or for draught."

There is much that is interesting in the neighbourhood of Bramhall and Cheadle Hulme, but I must be moving faster now, so, scarcely checking my pace to glance at the half-timbered and brick-painted building where I cross the line, I hurry through Cheadle Moseley to the village of Cheadle proper. As I ride up the road the square tower of the old church, framed by the houses on either side, makes a striking picture of a semi-rural, semi-suburban Cheshire village, for Cheadle is within easy reach by rail of Cottonopolis.

Inside Cheadle Church there are many things of note. Two figures in alabaster are supposed to represent Sir John Hondford, who died somewhere about 1460 after having distinguished himself in the French wars, and Sir John who died a little later, also a Hondford of Handforth. They have been

ascribed to other gallant knights of a later period, two of the Flodden combatants, William Hondford and Sir John

Cheadle.

Stanley, but it appears that the armour they wear does not agree with that of the early sixteenth century. There is also a

battered figure of Sir Thomas Brereton, carved in the local sandstone, easy to carve but easily chipped, in the South Chapel.

Cheadle Bulkeley is intimately connected with Anglesea, for Sir Richard Bulkeley, Chamberlain of North Wales in 1534, was lord of Beaumaris and Cheadle. Lady Katherine Bulkeley, the good Abbess of Godstow, fervently prayed to Lord Thomas Cromwell that she might be left alone at the Dissolution, but without avail. In her letter she says: "notwithestondyng that Dr. London, like a untrewe man, hathe informed your lordeship, that I am a spoiler and a waster, your good lordship shall know that the contrary is trewe; for I have not alienatyd one halporthe of goods of this monasterie, movable or unmovable, but have rather increasyd the same." She came, a broken-down woman, to Cheadle, with a pension of £50 a year, but her zeal for religion was not abated, and she rebuilt the chancel of the church in 1556, and was buried there "before the grett windowe." She must not, however, be confused with another Lady Katherine, also a pious woman, who died shortly afterwards. She was the wife of the next Sir Richard, and was a Davenport of Bramhall.

> She was a perfect jem of joye, a Lampe of godlye Light,
> A myrroure for benignytie: a famous worthye wight.
> A matron mother to the poore: a friend untoe the rest,
> An enemye to no Degree: a patterne to the best.

It is in Cheadle Church that we can trace on the stained glass of one of the windows Sir John Stanley's favourite motto: "Vanitas Vanitatum," for after his unrighteous imprisonment and his voluntary divorce, he renounced all worldly matters as vanity of vanities. The modern carving on the roof is well worth examining, for it is the work of a local man, the painstaking and gifted parish clerk in 1846.

A little beyond Cheadle is Gatley, an insignificant Cheshire village, but an important one for Manchester. All the district

through which I now pass is devoted to the raising of market produce, not so much corn and roots, but market-garden stuff. Small farms and even cottages have their fields cut up into squares wherein are growing onions, thyme, parsley, and herbs, and in other places the fields are resplendent with wallflowers, and great patches of pinks, primroses, and daffodils, in their various seasons. On the cottage side, generally on the gable end but sometimes all over the front, hang strings of succulent onions drying in the sun. All these are destined eventually for Shudehill Market. Somewhere between Cheadle and Gatley Bonnie Prince Charlie crossed the Mersey; he disdained a horse and waded across the stream up to his middle, a fact which has not been forgotten. Neither has another little incident of the Highlanders been forgotten in Gatley. One of these wild kilted men commanded George Hardy, a villager of Gatley, to pull off his brogues. Hardy, thinking the loss of his clogs preferable to an intimate acquaintance with the dirk, complied and handed the wooden-soled shoes to the Scotchman. The Highlander looked at them, and then threw them back; he could not, he said, wear shoes made out of a tree.

At Sharston, where the road divides, the nearest way to Northenden is to the right, but I wish to make my last divergence and so keep to the left. Soon I come to the woodlands of Wythenshawe, and when I reach the lodge I stand half way between the last two halls I shall visit. On my right, within the park, is Wythenshawe, on my left Baguley.

Wythenshawe Hall is a fine, rambling old place, some of it half-timbered but mostly plastered over. From a little distance it is exceedingly picturesque, its long, low front broken by gables and bay-windows, while mantling ivy and creepers add to its charm. The great hall and some of the more central portions were built in the days of Henry VIII., but much is Elizabethan, especially the panelling, richly moulded, which lines the walls of the great hall. In the withdrawing-room there is a patch of more modern panelling, for here one

of the Parliamentary cannon balls made a ghastly breach. For many weeks Mr. Tatton of Wythenshawe held out against the assaults of young Colonel Dukinfield and, tradition says, Fairfax himself; there are many stories of the siege, and six skeletons were subsequently dug up in the garden which are supposed to be those of some of the defenders. There is a record of one Captain Adams, a Parliamentarian officer, who was slain here, and the popular story of his death is generally believed in the neighbourhood. Adams was lounging on a wall, or at any rate exposing himself in anything but a modern way, and one of the maid-servants asked if she might try her hand with a musket. She was humoured, and apparently rolled poor Adams off the wall.

At Bagiley that bearne
His biding place had
And his ancestors of olde time
Have yearded there long,
Before William Conquerour
This Cuntry did inhabit.

Such is the reference to one of the Leghs, or Leighs, of Baguley in the "Scottish Fielde," preserved for our edification in the *Percy Reliques*. Baguley Hall is no such imposing structure as Wythenshawe, but it is by no means uninteresting. It has in fact one of the best preserved great halls in the country. When I stand at the gate of the farm, looking at the Hall, the thing that perhaps strikes me most is the unusually high roof of the central portion of the building. This central portion is old black and white, on either side are brick wings, the inhabited portion, of perhaps early Georgian days. When, however, I enter, I find myself in a magnificent fourteenth-century hall, open right up to the high sloping roof which is supported on great wooden arches and pillars. Massive is not the word for these beams, they are huge. But the hall has been altered; it is shorter than it was, and the passage to the kitchen is arched with stone. It is, however, a splendid room,

and we can imagine the feasts and revels which in early days took place in this mansion.

Against the opposite wall there lies a mutilated effigy, which at one time lay in Bowdon Church, but when the building was restored it was thrown out as useless rubbish. Poor old Sir

Peel Moat Bridge.

William Baggaley, little you thought that sacrilegious hands would overthrow your carefully carved picture in stone and cast it aside. But so it was, and some one more careful than the masons annexed the effigy and carted it to Partington. There, once again, it was forgotten, and was built into a garden wall. Here, however, two eminent Manchester anti-

quarians found the poor old statue and carefully returned him to his ancestral hall at Baguley, where he has lain ever since, an object of much interest and much senseless joke. Sir William lived in the fourteenth century, and is supposed to have built the Hall.

Now I must go back, and Gib Lane will take me across to the Northenden road. This is my last bit of Cheshire lane, and a very good example it is; somewhat wet and muddy in bad weather, but always attractive, with its thick thorn hedges, well filled in with undergrowth, where the bank voles feed and the white-throat sings and scolds me as I pass.

Northenden is a strange place now, much resorted to by trippers from Manchester on Saturday and Sunday. It is not the fine old church they go to visit, but the swing-boats and booths and the river, for here the Mersey is navigable for craft of a sort. The art of rowing is not very high at Northenden; the build of the boats is antique, running to beam and heavy timber. Perhaps it is as well that they are substantial, for accidents are not infrequent, and not long since I saw that a man had been upset and drowned. A fine bridge now crosses the river, but Northenden Boat is a name that clings even to-day. £6 : 13 : 4 was what Robert Tatton paid for Northern Boat in the sixteenth century; either tolls were light or traffic small to place the value so low. It is said there was a bridge here in the fourteenth century, but if so it must have been washed away, a not infrequent fate of early bridges. At any rate there was no bridge here in 1491 when William Harrington arrived with his bride, a daughter of Edmund Trafford of Trafford, on the day of their marriage. On horseback they rode into the ford, the lady probably on a pillion; but the Goyt and Etherow were sending their floods down from the stormy Peak, and the poor animal could not breast the spate. Their bodies were recovered, and, according to Randle Holme, buried at Mobberley by young Harrington's aunt; his sisters and heirs came into the property.

Later than this, in 1617, the ill-fated ford snatched another victim, William Tatton, who but the year before had become possessed of Wythenshawe.

The dirty water, sullied by the works of the Cheshire borderland, foams brown over the weir; the ancient bell of Northenden is tolling for evening prayer, a few Lancashire folk are lolling listlessly on the bridge, watching the water they know not why, "perplexed wi' leisure." I had thought of riding round by Ashley, where the White Lady haunts the front of the Hall of the Breretons, by Castle Mill, where once there was a castle, now forgotten in everything but name, and by Ringway; but time is fleeting, and I am here on the Lancashire border, only a few miles from Manchester itself. So I cross over into Withington, the modern Withington, not the Old Withington of Cheshire, and on the sets beside the electric trams I pedal back to Manchester, well satisfied with my ramble through the County Palatine, ancient and beautiful Cheshire.

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